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OR,
The Trail of the Bandit Nabob.

A Story of the Great Holden Mystery.

BY CAPTAIN HOWARD HOLMES,
AUTHOR OF "CAPTAIN GOLDGRIP" NOVELS,
"HERCULES GOLDSPUR," "SUNSHINE
SAM," ETC., ETC.

CHAPTER I.

THE HEAD OF THE TABLE.

"A 'MAN ought to be safe here a thousand years, and I of all hunted men ought to rest easy. I am dead! Yes, I died once, but not in this savage country. They found me dead in the river that washes the piers of New York, and there the keen-eyed spotters of the great city stopped and went to other trails. A man who has drifted for a week in the water is very dead, and I am that person," and the speaker laughed aloud and ran his hand through the handsome beard that covered while it graced his face.

He was not in the city whose name he had

ONCE, TWICE, THREE TIMES IT CUT ACROSS CAPTAIN GOLD-DUST'S FACE IN
BEWILDERING SUCCESSION.

spoken, but amid the wild country of the Colorado and not far from the famous Marble Canyon. He leaned against a large flat rock from which he could command a view of the grandest region in that grand country.

On either side rose the huge basaltic peaks of Arizona. Far to his right was to be seen the dark outline of the Coconino Forest, and behind him rose the buttes of Dead Man's Mountains.

He had spoken truly. He was dead to the world. This handsome man who could not have passed his forty-fifth year, who stood six feet in his cowhide boots, with the figure of a Hercules, the face of an Apollo and the strength of a Samson, was as dead to thousands as though six feet of soil covered him.

He was quite alone on the rock. For some time he had stood there with the shadows of mountain spurs lengthening around him, for the sun was sinking a crimson ball in the west and the night-birds of the elevated lands were out.

"Why not go down to the old camp and see what is happening there? I haven't met any of its denizens for a week and they might afford some amusement. I have a little dust which will give me an hour's play at the tables of Tiger Trace, and, then, I may hear from the beauty who slipped through my fingers when I was there, last."

He laughed again and began to descend the path which ran its serpentine course down the mountain and finally ended beyond the suburbs of a wild camp known as Tiger Trace.

It was a singular place for a camp of civilized beings, for there were no mines in the immediate region. A year prior to the date of our romance three men came to the spot on hunt of a mystery, one of those old mysteries for which the first white invaders of Arizona are responsible.

These three men, looking for a lost *presidio* beneath whose old walls was said to have been buried not only thousands of ounces of gold dust, but it covered the mouth of a marvelous mine, as well. They tarried there and from their camp extended their hunt which was destined to end in one of the many tragedies of the Southwest.

Falling out they killed each other, the last survivor being found, still alive, by another gold-hunter. He lived long enough to impart a story as marvelous as all the thousand-and-one tales of lost *presidios* to be heard to-day throughout Arizona, and died with a curse on his lips.

The gold-hunter with the secret took possession of the camp; was joined by others until quite a motley crowd held the place, and Tiger Trace became one of the best known gold-camps in the Territory and one of the hardest, as well.

Toward this place the man on the mountain bent his steps as the sun sunk for the day behind the volcanic peaks of the Three Skulls.

Already the lights of Tiger Trace had been lighted and the pedestrian walked almost to the small Plaza in the center of town, but turned abruptly to the right and entered a shanty from which he heard laughter and a wild song.

"That's Full-Deck Frank and the same old song," said he.

A moment later he stood near the rough counter at one end of the room, quietly surveying the crowd.

Backed against the dingy wall was a young man who was singing a rough song of the camps. He might have been five-and-twenty. His figure was good, and over his ample shoulders fell a mass of black hair which, as any one could see, was his glory and pride.

He was the best dressed occupant of the saloon, and whenever he raised his hands, as he did in a certain way while singing the lively chorus, one could see that he wore cuffs and that diamond rings glistened on his fingers.

Until the song had been sung through, no one seemed to notice the person who had come in last.

"Let's have another," cried half a dozen voices amid the boisterous clapping of rough hands. "You don't get off with but one song, Full-Deck Frank, so tune up and give us another one!"

At this moment the eye of the singer fell upon the man who had been watching him so closely.

"Not to-night. I see a friend," remarked the singer, and leaving the wall, he came forward and held out his hand to the new-comer.

"You heard me, eh?" he said, with a smile. "I like to amuse these death-angels occasionally. There's no money in it for me, but now and then they throw into me some of Buck's lightning whisky and I feel like one of the citizens of hades."

Both men laughed, Full-Deck Frank the heartier, and the two walked out.

"That was Captain Gold-Dust," averred several who had caught sight of the stranger. "Hasn't been here for a week or ten days. Wonder if he didn't come for a game? No one knows where he gets his gold-dust. It is better than we find 'round here. Maybe the old rumors that he has found the Lost Presidio are true."

Full-Deck Frank and his companion walked across the Plaza and entered a shanty which belonged to the young man.

Inside everything was as neat as a pin. There was an oval mirror on the wall, and when the

youth had struck a light he went up to it and seemed to rearrange some parts of his toilet.

"A dandy and a devil," mused Captain Gold-Dust. "If I had had him with me when the ferrets of the East were looking high and low for me, I never would have buried myself in this accursed country. We would have been more than a match for all of them; but I outwitted them in the end, so why talk in this strain?"

Full-Deck Frank turned suddenly from the mirror and came forward.

"Captain, they have revived the old story," stopping in front of Captain Gold-Dust and laying one hand on his shoulder.

"What old story?"

"Why, the one about the Lost Presidio. They say now that you have surely found it."

Captain Gold-Dust smiled, his lips in parting displaying two rows of even, white teeth.

"The infernal fools! don't they know that the old Spaniards never got up here with their forts and missions?" he cried.

"You can't make Tiger Trace believe they did not."

"I don't intend to. Let them believe what they will. You know better, Frank. But I am here to ask you a question or two."

Full-Deck Frank folded his arms and waited for his friend to proceed.

"Have you seen anything of the girl?"

"Not a glimpse, captain."

"She never came back, eh?"

"Not to my knowledge."

"Strange, isn't it?" and that Captain Gold-Dust was somewhat puzzled, his countenance showed.

"It's most deuced strange," was the reply. "It was at The Three Angels, wasn't it?"

"Yes. I was losing like smoke, and all at once I looked, and there stood the prettiest girl I have seen since leaving—"

He paused suddenly, as if about to disclose a secret, but almost immediately continued:

"Well, she was the most beautiful creature I have ever seen; I can say that, anyhow. There she stood, but the moment she saw my face she turned and walked out. There was no more play for me after that. I found that she left Tiger Trace on a horse, and that was all. The best trailer in Arizona, and I don't except the chief of the Red Ravens, could not have tracked her. It was as if she had vanished in mid-air. No one had ever seen her before, but she was flesh and blood, I don't care what some of them say; for there were the tracks of her horse on the Plaza."

"I saw them myself, you know," observed Full-Deck Frank.

Captain Gold-Dust was silent for a moment.

"Any new citizens, Frank?" he asked.

"None; only the man who dropped down upon us from Colorado last week."

The questioner did not seem to care about this person for he began to inquire after the games, then in full blast in all parts of the camp, and wound up by proffering the young man a lot of dust for a stake.

"I don't want to play myself," he explained. "I don't care about it to-night for I feel that luck isn't with me. I'm going off again."

He strode to the door and was watched by the young man who had taken the dust, with a bow.

Captain Gold-Dust went out and stopped before the shanty.

At that moment a flash of light in a cabin barely twenty feet away streamed toward him and he fell back with his gaze riveted upon a figure seen through the little window.

"Who is that man, Frank?" he cried, seizing the young man's arm and still staring at the person in the other hut.

"That's the man who came last week—the one I mentioned."

"What does he call himself?"

"Morel, I think."

The man in the adjoining hut had quietly seated himself at a small table and was inditing a letter. Captain Gold-Dust seemed wonderfully interested in him for some time, but all at once he fell back and looked at Full-Deck Frank.

"Morel, did you say? So that is the new citizen of Tiger Trace?"

"That's the man, captain."

Captain Gold-Dust gazed a moment longer and then suddenly started off.

Full-Deck Frank, happening to glance at his friend's hands, saw that one of them had half-drawn a revolver and that he appeared to be tearing himself from certain impulses which seemed to be dragging him down.

"Why don't you kill him?" he cried in a whisper.

"Kill whom? Morel?"

There was no answer; Captain Gold-Dust literally ran from the spot.

"What is the matter with the man? Is he mad?" exclaimed the young man. "I never saw him act that way before. Let him go. I'll go down to Jarillo Jack's and stake the dust he gave me," and Full-Deck Frank turned and went back to the saloon.

All night long the tables of Tiger Trace had lots of patrons. Fortune smiled on Full-Deck

Frank, and at last through the first flushes of dawn he returned to his shanty.

But, why did he stop near the door of Morel's hut?

There were dark red stains on the soil. He noticed these with a shiver and then stepped to the open door.

One look was enough for the young gambler of the mountain camp.

The cabin was strangely occupied, for on the little table where he had last seen Morel sat the ghastly head of a human being!

Full-Deck Frank looked a moment and when he recovered in a measure, ran back and announced the discovery to the denizens of Tiger Trace.

CHAPTER II.

THE MAN WITH A MISSION.

IN the parlor of a certain house in New York, a stone's throw from the abodes of the richest citizens of the great metropolis, sits a woman of fifty with gaze fastened on the door leading into the well-carpeted hall.

The clock, ticking on the mantel near by, is about to denote the hour of ten, and the lights that fall upon her show that her anxiety is great.

Presently the door-bell sends its clear tone throughout the mansion, and she almost starts from her chair while she hears the answering feet of the servant, whose nap the bell has disturbed.

"It is he! It is the tracker at last! He is on time," and that moment the clock began striking.

The closing of the front door is followed by voices for a second, and then a footstep approaches the parlor. The next moment a man enters.

The woman, who has been waiting for him with almost uncontrollable interest, fixes an eye upon him, and looks him over from head to foot.

After all he may not be the person she has sent for.

Seeing her evident doubt, the caller advances and extends a card, which she receives, and reads thereon:

"MONCKTON MOREL, *Detective.*"

"I thought you would come," says the lady, waving him to a chair, while she closes a door left open by the servant.

"You know why I have sent for you, I suppose? It is the same old trail. I know you men think I am mad; but so long as life exists I shall look for that man whose body was not taken from the river that winter morning."

There is no answer; the detective, one of the best of the hundreds who track men in New York, was looking into the face before him as if he were seeking traces of insanity in the full, expressive eyes that brightened it.

Everybody knew Mrs. Eva Holden, and of course every one knew something of the Holden Mystery—that dark series of crimes which had darkened the career of as noble a house as ever existed in the city.

"They have told me that old trails are not mysterious to you," continued Mrs. Holden.

"I make no such boast."

"But you have been very successful. I know that. Ten years ago to-morrow the crime was committed—the first and darkest one, I mean. This is the same house, and while you are here I want to take you over the ground, for I believe you have never been here before."

"While I have never visited you, I have not been entirely unacquainted with the crime which was a mystery to my brother trailers ten years ago."

Mrs. Holden led the detective from the room and showed him over the whole house while she narrated the particulars of the crime which had made her a widow.

Morel, the detective, listened as though it was all new to him when, in fact, he had heard the particulars from lips as well calculated to give them as the widow herself.

Still talking, Mrs. Holden came back to the parlor and the two reseated themselves.

"The supposed murderer and afterward child thief, Bolivar Blake, was, at the time of the tragedy, a millionaire," she said. "He was as handsome a man as one will see in a day's hunt. The papers called him the Gotham Croesus and in a fine mausoleum in Greenwood rest the bloated remains of the man found in the river by the patrol. That man was not Bolivar Blake; I care not what the inquest decided. I know that the well known Blake rings were found on the fingers—rings that were heirlooms in the family; I know that the watch bought by the nabob a few months before the crime of this house was in the pocket of the dead man and that people identified the body by other tests; but I say in the face of all these things that the Gotham Croesus did not perish in the river."

Mrs. Holden spoke with emphatic tone.

"I have been laughed at a thousand times. Detectives sent for by me have gone out of my house laughing in their sleeves over my convictions. You may do the same when I have dismissed you. But I am sure that I am right. Somewhere under the sun lives the man called

Bolivar Blake, the assassin. I cannot show you the trail, but I can do this:

She crossed the room followed by the detective's eye and stopped in front of a rosewood *secretaire*, which she unlocked:

"The other night I retired earlier than usual and left the front door unlocked for Ada, who had gone out to a friend's. Now, the girl, who is reliable, came home a quarter before eleven, and went right to bed. Of this I am certain for I had been lying awake and heard her open and shut the door, and then heard her come upstairs. A few minutes later I heard the clock. The next morning I found on this table a bit of folded paper which was not there when I retired and which, I am sure, Ada did not place, for she did not enter the parlor when she came in. This is the paper," and the wife of the murdered man held out a piece of paper which she allowed Morel to take from her hand.

"Yes, read it. It is one of the last chapters of the Holden Mystery," she went on. "I have shown it to no one, and though Ada knows that it is in my possession, she is ignorant of its contents."

Monk Morel leaned toward the light and opened the letter which consisted of a single sheet of heavy paper.

The writing was easily traced for it was in a firm hand and the letters had been deliberately formed:

"MRS. HOLDEN:—

"There are hiding places under the flag of this country which the eye of the sharpest ferrets cannot find. If they tell you that the grave in Greenwood holds the bones of the Gotham Cræsus, tell them for me they lie. I know better. You need not try to discover the writer of this note for I cannot be discovered. I know that the Great Holden Mystery, which has baffled the best detectives of the city, will continue to baffle them if they look for the trail *h-re*. Tell them that in the Great Southwest are hiding places for the hunted; that among the volcanic peaks of that wonder-land are places which the eye of the eagle has not seen and which the prowling wolf has never invaded. If you ever send out another avenger—if you ever give another detective a commission, send him out of the city and let him hunt where the quarry is. It is not here and the grave in Greenwood is a lie.

"ONE WHO KNOWS."

Morel was about to hand back the letter when he happened to hold it for a moment between him and the light on the table.

In a flash he had started slightly.

"What is it?" asked Mrs. Holden, leaning forward, with a woman's eager curiosity.

The detective said nothing. He was bending toward the light with the sheet between thumb and finger and almost touching the lamp.

"This is a double letter," said he, looking over the top of the sheet and catching the woman's questioning eyes.

"What is that?"

"A letter written with two kinds of ink. See for yourself. The words I have just read have disappeared and others have taken their place. This is the clever work of chemicals."

Mrs. Holden was almost touching the detective's shoulder in her eagerness, and her breath seemed gone.

"I have seen this sort of work before," declared Morel. "But, look here! There are but three short lines on the sheet, as it now appears in the light; the rest of the page is taken up with a map."

"I see! I see!"

The detective turned the sheet in several directions.

"The name of the State or Territory, whichever it is, is not given on the map," he continued. "It seems to be one of the Far West divisions and we must regard it as such in the light of the letter just read. Ah, I see now. It is a map of Arizona!"

Mrs. Holden uttered a slight cry.

"I can trace the Colorado River," continued Morel. "See how it bends here, where the Marble Canyon is. And here are dark ridges to designate mountains."

"And is not that a darker spot, as if the maker of the map intended to locate a camp or town?"

"There is such a spot where you touched. Wait! there are letters underneath the dot, and a little hand in chemical ink points to the place."

"For heaven's sake let nothing escape you, Mr. Morel!"

The human ferret moved his chair to the very edge of the table. He studied the map till his eyes ached.

Mrs. Holden sprung up and ran to the *secretaire*:

"My husband's magnifying glass," she cried, coming back and placing in Morel's hand a silver-mounted magnifier which he at once applied to the object before him—the dot and minute writing on the paper.

"It is 'Tiger Trace,'" he said without looking up. "It is the only name on the whole map."

"He must be there!"

A hand fell upon the detective's arm and closed there and the hunter of men looking up beheld the gaze of the millionaire widow riveted upon him.

"Did you hear me?" she cried. "He is there! In the heart of Arizona this man, supposed by more than a million people to be dead, has found

a hiding-place. The mountains of the territory conceal the murderer of my husband and the stealer of my child! Ten years have passed away; that letter is not dated; but remember that it came to my room the other night; that I found it on this table when I came down in the morning. If he were dead it would not have been left here; if Bolivar Blake, the Gotham Cræsus, were not living would that map of Arizona be there? I tell you, Mr. Morel, that you have a clue to the Great Holden Tragedy; you hold in your hand the thread by which the skein can be untangled. You are not afraid to undertake the task?"

"Do you want me to undertake it?" asked the detective calmly.

"I do. There is no other man whom I would sooner trust with this task. I happen to know that the wild West is not entirely unknown to you. They told me how you once tracked a man from camp to camp, from canyon to canyon in Colorado, and how you brought him back to hang in our Tombs here. Why can you not accomplish in Arizona what you accomplished in Colorado? Monkton Morel, this trail, dark so long, has had light thrown upon it and very unexpectedly, at last. It is not for us to discover who wrote this letter, nor how it reached me, for the writer would keep that a secret; but the real trail is in the far West."

"That is true."

"Take it. Take the trail thus found and bankrupt me, if necessary. Draw on me for a million and if that is not enough, draw for another one. Only find the man who darkened my life and I will see that the crime of this house is avenged. I have sealed in my desk a lot of papers which I will turn over to you for perusal on your way to the human hunting-ground. Remember that the wild Southwest is the home of the desperado; that ten years have passed since the blackest night in my history, and that they may have played strange freaks with the fortunes of Bolivar Blake, the Gotham Cræsus. But, find him, hunt him down, no matter what it costs. That is your mission."

Mrs. Holden fell back and looked for a moment into the impassive but handsome face of the detective.

Folding the letter with a farewell look at it, he stood before her.

"Madam, I accept the mission," said he, looking down into her upturned face.

"Keep the letter. You may want it for a guide," was the reply. "I know that I may be sending you into the jaws of death—"

"Let that remain unsaid. I have been into those same jaws before," interrupted Monk Morel with a smile. "Hunting men is a passion with me. I shall not fail in this instance. I have never failed since I became a hound for human game."

Ten minutes later a man came down the steps of the Holden Mansion. It was Monk Morel the shadow, and the most exciting hunt of his life was before him.

CHAPTER III.

WILD WINNIE'S DROP.

THE finding of the severed head in Tiger Trace took place just a month after the New York detective received his dangerous commission from Mrs. Holden, the millionaire widow.

Full-Deck Frank's startling discovery was enough to excite the mountain city as it had never been excited before.

It was not long after the discovery of the terrible tragedy that a crowd of rough-looking men held sway in front of the particular cabin and all had gazed upon the hideous spectacle which still occupied the same spot where it had been found.

The body of the murdered man lay at the foot of the table and the overturned stool, with a few other scattered pieces of furniture, told that a brief struggle had taken place, and that the dead man had battled as heroically as he could for his life.

"Don't you see that he was taken at a disadvantage?" said a tall man who elbowed his way inside the hut and took in the ghastly sight for a few moments. "He was seated at the table, evidently busy at something. His back was partly to the door which must have been opened softly and by a man-tiger at that. Whew! it makes my flesh creep; not that I'm afraid to die myself, but at the thought of being sneaked upon like this man war. Who knows anything about him only that his name was Morel and that he said he was 'a knocker-around from Nowbar?'"

Some volunteered the information that the dead man was a sort of gold tramp; but another man disputed this.

"His hands war too neat and clean for that," averred this individual. "He was a man with a mission of some sort, and the chap what killed him knew what that mission war."

Full-Deck Frank started at these words.

He recalled how Captain Gold-Dust stared when he caught sight of the last arrival in the light of his lamp, and how he had half-drawn his revolver, clutching it like a madman; but he did not say a word about this.

One thing prevented the citizens of Tiger Trace from fully identifying the dead man, and

this was the mutilation which had been made after the murder, and probably after the severing of the head.

The face had been cut across with the murderer's knife, and in a manner which completely destroyed its features. The assassin seemed to have taken fiendish delight in thus mutilating the features of his victim, and though the head was at last passed around among the hard men of the camp and examined in the bright light of early morning, it was tenderly handled, and at last universally pronounced the head of the man named Morel.

Suddenly some one asked after Captain Gold-Dust, remembering that he had visited the camp but was there no more.

Full-Deck Frank replied the captain had gone off, and gave the hour of his departure, and some one with a laugh remarked that he had gone back to the Lost Presidio.

Nothing was found in the cabin of the murdered man to give a clue to his history.

The head was replaced as well as it could be done, and when the sun was mounting the top of Death's Head Peak, it was carried to the little cemetery near the edge of the town, and there lowered into a shallow hole made for the dead man by the roughs of Tiger Trace.

"Thar must be something somewhere concerning that man," said Full-deck Frank to himself, when he went back after the funeral. "What made Captain Gold-Dust start so when he caught sight of him at the table in the shanty? Did the captain come back after he left me? I went down to the tables and played there with the dust he gave me. I was there till daylight. If I had stayed at home I might have heard the murderer come."

The young gambler was nearing the cabin with a murder mystery, when he saw the door open and a person well-known to every one in the camp appear on the threshold.

"I wonder what Copeland thinks about it?" thought Full-Deck Frank, eying the person so suddenly seen.

Copeland was the Gentile of Tiger Trace. He was not past twenty-three, very seldom turned a card, did not mix much with the hard spirits of the camp, but for all this had no enemies that any one knew of at the time.

The moment Copeland saw that he was attracting attention and from Full-Deck Frank, he left the door and came forward.

The two men met.

"Well, who was he?" asked Frank, looking sharply into Copeland's eyes. "You've been with him about as much as any of us and you ought to know something."

"His name was Monk Morel," was the reply, "and he came from the eastern seaboard."

"You've found this out, have you? Did he tell you this, Copeland?"

"No; I have made a discovery."

"Ha, and what was that?"

"Curiosity led me to the shanty and I have given it a thorough inspection. I guess I sounded every piece of wall under the roof and found in one corner deftly hidden some papers which the dead man evidently brought to Tiger Trace with him. He was a detective."

Full-Deck Frank had another queer start.

"But, in the name of heaven, what brought him 'way out here?"

Copeland smiled.

"I shall have to stop right here for you are asking questions beyond my power to answer."

"But you have the papers you found in the logs?"

"No, sir; I burned them."

"The Old Harry you did, Copeland! When did you go crazy?"

"They were private papers and were not intended for the eyes of Tiger Trace. I didn't read all of them myself."

Frank looked incredulous.

"You will find the ashes in the shanty if you don't believe I made way with the papers," said the young man, walking off, and the following moment the gambler of the camp was staring at Copeland and biting his lips till they bled.

"Found papers and destroyed them, did he? By thunder! I don't believe it. It don't look natural, under the red circumstances. You either found no documents, or you did not destroy them; one or the other."

He was watching Copeland with the eye of the hawk.

"There's something very mysterious about the whole thing. I don't know just what to think. When will Captain Gold-Dust come back? Ever? If the young girl who appeared so suddenly to us all the last time he was here were with us, he might be depended upon to come back; but now he may never return."

Full-Deck Frank's words were followed by a quick turn on his part and he saw riding down the street an Indian whose figure attracted him from the first.

"The red chief of the Red Ravens," said he, turning to watch the red-skin, who had seen him. "Owlet hasn't been here for months—not since Coldrip Dick pushed him out of the Three Angels."

The red rider, who was well mounted and to all appearances a person barely out of his teens, though it is always difficult to guess correctly

an Indian's age, rode straight toward Full-Deck Frank, to whom he touched his forehead by way of a salute, a custom learned from the white officers at the forts.

"You should have been here last night," said the young sport.

"Why?" asked the Indian.

"One man lost his head—had it cut off."

Owlet merely looked inquisitive and waited for more information.

"It was a stranger's head that was lost," continued Frank.

"How, white brother?"

"I forgot that you had never seen the victim, as you haven't shown up for a month or more. Well, the dead man was a detective, a trailing hound I suppose you would call him. He came about a week ago and has been with us ever since. Well, he's with us still, for that matter; but he's over there," and Frank pointed to the newly-made grave on the hillside.

Owlet looked in that direction for some time in silence.

"Who kill him?" he asked presently.

"That's the puzzle. He wasn't in a condition to tell us when we found him. His head was off, you see, Owlet—standing on the table, while the body was on the floor."

The young red-skin looked toward the bloody shanty.

"By the way," asked the sport, "did you see anything of the old captain on your road hither?"

"Gold-Dust?"

"Yes. Was here last night, but went off before the murder occurred."

"Which way?"

"Toward the Buttes."

"Huh!"

The Indian leaped to the ground and throwing his reins over the black steed's neck, went toward the scene of the tragedy.

Frank did not follow, but watched him with a half smile on his face and at last turned toward the Plaza.

"It's not very safe for that young red to be here," he said to himself. "We don't hold the Red Ravens in the very best of friendship. The boys believe that they have to do with the concealment of the Lost Presidio; that the band was organized for the purpose of keeping the old fort and its treasure from being found by white men. That's what brought on the fight between Owlet and Coldgrip Dick. It was foolhardiness for the red to venture alone into Tiger Trace, something he has never done before. But he's his own master and must look out for his own head. Heads are deuced unsafe here just now, and if the boys take a notion—Ho!"

The exclamation was called forth by the sudden appearance of four men who had just sallied forth from the main gambling den on the little Plaza.

"The Indian has entrapped himself. There'll be another tragedy in less than twenty minutes."

The four men, all of whom were armed with revolvers, walked toward the dead man's shanty into which they had evidently seen the red-skin go. They were splendid specimens of tough manhood, with dark shirts and high boots, besides a profusion of long hair.

They walked with the precision of military men, but with their eyes riveted on the cabin.

Twenty yards from the shanty they halted and stood in line.

"Forward, ten steps!" Full-Deck Frank heard one of them say.

The quartette advanced again and halted with the distance between them and their intended victim shortened by one-half.

The door of Morel's shanty flew open and the lithe figure of Owlet, the Indian, appeared on the step.

"Cover him!" ordered the leader of the four, and eight revolvers leaped to a level with the scarlet breast and quivered there with their loads of death.

"Hands up, Owlet!"

The red-skin did not stir.

"You will surrender to us the secret of the Lost Presidio, or we will kill you where you stand!"

The stillness which followed these words was broken in a manner unexpected by red and white.

"Men of Tiger Trace, you shoot that red-skin at the risk of your own lives!"

"Wild Winnie, by heavens!" cried Full-Deck Frank.

CHAPTER IV.

A LITTLE TOO LATE.

WILD WINNIE was a character of the region. The girl was a mystery which no one could solve, and being regarded as a creature not altogether right, was granted liberties which no one else could have.

Her visits to Tiger Trace were periodical. At times she came at night, and would appear to the gamblers in the card-dens of the camp and remain awhile looking quietly on; but, for the most part, she dropped in upon the mountain toughs in the daytime, when she would visit

every cabin that had a tenant and remain some time, telling the wildest stories of gold mines in the hills, all of which the men attributed to her imagination.

No one knew whose child she was. It was said that she was the offspring of a beautiful woman who abandoned her husband, and, seeking the wilds of the Southwest, died in bringing her into the world, and that the child had grown up among the Indians, who, believing her mad, had treated her with a kindness seldom found among the red scourges of the plains.

This was the person who had warned the four would-be slayers of Tiger Trace that they would take Owlet's life at the risk of their own.

She stood erect a few feet from the group with a revolver in one hand and the muzzle directed at their breasts.

Her dress was half Indian. The soft buckskin leggings that covered her nether limbs were met at the knee by the fringes of her jacket-like garment, and here and there were more fringes which, added to her dark olive complexion, rendered her whole appearance the more like an Indian princess.

The young red-skin looked at the girl and saw her defiant attitude with no change of countenance.

The four roughs looked at one another and shut their teeth hard.

"Shoot him down and risk it!" said one under his breath.

"Wild Winnie means business. She will shoot."

"But she can't kill all of us."

There was no answer to this, but the revolvers leveled at Owlet suddenly dropped, and the men turned toward the girl.

"What's that Injun to you?" asked the leader.

Wild Winnie smiled, but did not drop her weapon an inch.

"Some other time, Captain Owlet," remarked the rough. "Tiger Trace isn't a healthy place for you, and you and your Red Ravens want to keep their distance. We don't want you hyer. This is a white man's camp, and we don't need visitors of your ilk."

A smile seemed to wreath the dark lips of the red-man.

"Owlet has been to see where the white man lost his head."

"Be careful that you don't lose yours," was the savage retort.

The four toughs retraced their way, and Full-Deck Frank heard their mutterings of future vengeance.

For a few seconds Wild Winnie looked after them; then suddenly turned away.

The revolver had dropped to her side, and she was carrying it carelessly and apparently thinking deeply.

"Wild Winnie save Owlet," muttered the young red-skin, following her with his eagle eye. "Time will come when Owlet pay her back."

By this time nearly all Tiger Trace knew that the Indian had come back, and a crowd had congregated on the Plaza, which the four discomfited men reached with no good feelings over their failure to force from the red the secret he was supposed to guard.

By some means or other it had become known that Owlet had visited Morel's shanty, and the hot-headed were ready to connect him with the terrible tragedy of the severed head.

The excitement, but half-smothered, was most intense.

"The captain of the Red Ravens knows something about the murder," went from lip to lip.

"Why not hold him till he tells the truth? If he gets away from us now, after what has happened, we may never get another chance at him, or he may swoop down upon Tiger Trace with his infernal band and give us trouble."

There was an outward movement of the crowd; it moved toward Morel's cabin.

At this juncture there appeared in view, walking quietly toward the Plaza, Wild Winnie.

The sight of the girl seemed to hold the crowd back, but the leaders stopped and watched her. The faces of the four whose plans she had just spoiled grew sullen.

She came forward with a smile on the face which, while not handsome, was striking, and the soft blue eyes fell upon the assembled toughs of the mountain camp with a gleam of friendly pleasure.

She did not appear to notice the feelings that controlled the mob, but came on, nor halted until she stood near enough to Coldgrip Dick to have touched him.

"What's up, Winnie?" asked the tough.

"I have found another mine richer than all," was the reply, at which a suppressed laugh manifested itself.

"Be sure you're right about it. You know you have found a good many already."

"So I have and all are rich ones. The like of the last one was never seen. The gold lies on the ground and waits for some one to pick it up."

"Fudge!" cried a young man. "She fools me no longer. Didn't I follow her from trail to trail for three days in hopes there was some truth in her wild tales about rediscovered bonanzas? She can't fool me any more, that crazy girl can't."

"The very walls of the new mine shine with gold," continued Wild Winnie. "It is out there in the mountains and no one knows where but me."

"But what have you done with your Injun friend?"

In an instant the mad girl turned upon the speaker and for a moment looked him through.

"Why didn't you let the boys shoot him in the shanty of the man who lost his head last night?"

"They had no right to kill Owlet!" she cried, with spirit.

"One has a right to kill a rattlesnake wherever he finds one. That's my doctrine."

Wild Winnie, with eyes still fastened upon the man who had spoken with such savageness, came forward until she stood face to face with him.

"Look out, Taos!" said some one. "The girl is getting out of humor."

The last word had hardly been spoken when the hand of Wild Winnie shot upward and the man called Taos was looking into the muzzle of her six-shooter.

"So you will kill Owlet wherever you find him, will you? You call him a rattlesnake, do you?"

"Look here, girl; I don't want a quarrel with you in the first place, because I don't believe you've got all your buttons, and secondly because you're a girl and—"

The figure of the girl bent over and the deadly revolver went nearer to the face of the man who aroused her ire.

There was fire in the depths of the blue orbs, and the hand that clutched the weapon had a grip of iron.

"Let her drop, Taos. She's got the Old Harry in her this morning," said a voice at Taos Trip's elbow.

The words of warning seemed to come too late, for suddenly Taos found the other hand of Wild Winnie at his throat and he was being forced back with the revolver nearly touching his forehead.

A dozen hands were thrust out, but the girl nimbly twisted from them all and had the startled man on the rim of the mob before he could speak again.

"Wild Winnie don't want your blood, Taos Trip," she said with a light laugh. "You are a coward and not ready to die. But, touch Owlet and the gates of hell shall open for your guilty soul! What is the Indian to me, eh? Owlet is Wild Winnie's brother!" and she threw the man from her and turned back before he recovered himself.

"Listen all of you to Wild Winnie!" she cried, straightening in front of those who had witnessed her action. "The life of Owlet is sacred to me. You touch him at your peril. You call me mad and maybe I am; but the hand that harms the young chief of the Ravens shall feel the vengeance of Winnie, the Gold Queen of the Hills. You are not the only tigers in this part of the world. There are others just as dangerous. Their teeth are as sharp as yours, and they can rend and tear with the same power."

She turned her back on the surprised mob and coolly walked off.

"If you don't want your Injun lover hurt see that he keeps away from this den of tigers!"

Wild Winnie stopped and for a moment gazed at the crowd, picking out the man from whom these words had come.

"Fools! Owlet shall come and go when he likes, and it is death from Wild Winnie's revolver to harm a hair on his head! I go back to the golden trails of the mountains. There is yet another mine for Winnie to find and it is richer than all yet discovered by her."

Derisive laughs followed this, but the girl went on.

"We are fools to let that crazy girl beat us every time," declared a tall, long-haired man whose face wore a scar which rendered it almost hideous. "She holds this camp in terror and we have this day let her cow us all."

"Yonder she is, Monte Mack. All you have to do is to follow her and call her to account. Have you grit enough to do that?"

Monte Mack looked at the speaker, a young man who stood on the outside of the crowd.

"What's that, Copeland?" he exclaimed.

"Yonder she is, I say. Wild Winnie is but a girl, yet I don't see you attempt to call her to account."

There was a growl from Monte Mack and in an instant he had taken a quick stride toward the young man, but some one, expecting a collision, stepped between.

"I say that the young Indian must be shot, and that the girl yonder shall not terrorize this camp!"

Copeland made no reply, but his eyes looked an expressive language, and in a moment he was walking toward his own shanty.

"That man," said Monte Mack, pointing at Copeland, "that man is the Jonah of Tiger Trace. Nothing suits him that suits us. He would take the Indian's part, and, by the eternal! for one, I swear that the reign of Wild Winnie has ended in this camp."

This was followed by cheers of approval, and

Monte Mack, the bully of Tiger Trace, sought his own hut.

"The Indian first! the Indian now!" cried several voices, and there was a wild dash for the dead man's shanty.

Nothing stopped the mad mob.

It reached the hut, threw wide the door, and sprung inside.

But, the interior was empty; the man they sought was gone, and on the floor still shone the blood-marks of the tragedy, and where the severed head had occupied the table with a splotch larger than all.

The rage of the mob when it discovered that Owlet was not there knew no bounds. The men fell back with mutterings of rage.

"Follow him!" cried some one.

"Ay, ay! Blood for blood! The Injun is the murderer of Morel!" and the wild men of Tiger Trace rushed away.

CHAPTER V.

A NEW TENANT.

FULL-DECK FRANK, the young gambler, waited a full week for Captain Gold-Dust's return—a week of eagerness and mental anxiety on his part, and his desire to see the man who had started so upon catching sight of Morel was intensified by the scenes which followed the tragedy of the shanty.

More than once the young sport slipped from Tiger Trace and made long excursions in the surrounding mountains, climbing the volcanic sides or watching the trails which he thought Captain Gold-Dust frequented, but without success.

The captain was as much of a mystery as Wild Winnie. He associated with no one, made no man his confidant, and Frank was the only person in all that region who had received any marks of distinction at his hands.

Tiger Trace tolerated him because whenever he came he was pretty sure to play, and, in nine cases out of ten, to lose. No one seemed to care anything about his past life. He was Captain Gold-Dust to all, but to some he was a secret keeper, and they believed that he drew on the Lost Presidio for the dust he lost at the tables of the mountain camp.

Only once had he been followed by any one with the intention of tracking him to the lost treasure.

Six months prior to the opening of our story, Captain Gold-Dust was shadowed back to the mountains by two men who had sworn to run him down. It was known to Full-Deck Frank and one or two others that they had undertaken this task, and the result of the trail was awaited with curiosity.

Months rolled away and Captain Gold-Dust came back and took his accustomed seat at the table; but the trailers did not return.

There was nothing in the captain's actions to indicate that he had met his shadowers; not a word was dropped by him which solved the mystery of their absence.

But they came not. Those who did not know why they went away said they had sought other fields of adventure, but Frank and his friends looked at the impassive face of Captain Gold-Dust and read there, so they said to one another, the story of the missing men.

The trail had failed and the handsome man, who came from no one knew whither, carried in his breast the secret of the hunt.

Ever after that whenever Captain Gold-Dust came to Tiger Trace, Full-Deck Frank looked at him with eager eyes and wondered in what unexplored pass he had left the bones of the trackers.

During the week which followed the tragedy of the severed head the cabin in which the crime was committed was kept closed but closely watched.

It was thought that Owlet, the Indian, might come back, or that some one else connected with the deed would return to search its walls, or seek to probe into the dark mystery it held locked within them.

One night Frank saw standing near the shanty the figure of Copeland.

The young Gentile of Tiger Trace had not crossed his path since he saw him emerge from the dead man's cabin to tell him that Morel was a detective, and that certain papers which he had discovered in a secret niche in the walls had been destroyed by him.

Copeland was looking at the shanty with a curiosity which led the young gambler to believe that he was about to pay it another visit and he began to give him particular attention.

Copeland was younger than Frank. He had not been long in camp, having come to it a few months prior to Morel's arrival. Just what his mission was no one knew, but he had said that he was a sort of exile from civilization, and intended to bury himself among the mountains for a year or two.

Monte Mack had called him the Jonah of Tiger Trace and this name had clung to him ever since.

Frank watched Copeland and saw him at last move toward the shanty.

"I have him now!" murmured the gambler. "I shall see if he destroyed the papers. If he did not, I will find them, cost what it may."

Copeland looked all about him and at last glided into the empty cabin, shutting the door behind him. This was a signal for the young sport and in a moment he was at the door himself, listening with all ears.

Presently he caught the gleam of a lucifer and when he saw that Copeland was investigating with a light, he moved round to the window and looked, to behold the Gentile of Tiger Trace moving from spot to spot, feeling the walls with his hands and looking closely at the same time.

All at once Copeland stopped and lighted another match.

In another minute he had found an opening in the log before him, and Frank saw that he had opened a square door in the wood large enough to admit his hand.

The next moment Copeland drew from his bosom a paper which he thrust into the opening and then closed it.

"If that's a letter, in heaven's name, for whom is it intended?" ejaculated the young gambler. "No one has inhabited the old shanty since the detective lost his head. But I have you now, Mr. Copeland. I will know the contents of your letter before I sleep."

Five minutes later the door opened and Copeland came out and moved off.

If he had looked back at a certain time he would have seen the figure which slipped into the hut and shut the door.

Frank stood in the dark for a little while and waited until he thought Copeland had reached the Plaza. Then he crept toward the spot where he had seen the secret recess in the wall exposed and began operations.

A lighted match, shaded by his hand, assisted him.

For some time his fingers moved up and down the log, and at last, when he was on the point of despairing, the little door flew open, and before him lay Copeland's deposit!

With eager fingers Frank removed the folded paper, and thrust it into an inner pocket.

"It takes a Philadelphia lawyer to beat me," he chuckled, as he threw the match at his feet and slipped out. "I think I will be wiser than ever to-night, and if this letter betrays you as a stool-pigeon or traitor, Copeland, you will wish you had never seen Tiger Trace."

It was but the work of a second for the gambler to reach his own shanty, and the lamp which he at once lighted afforded him all the light he needed.

Frank took a seat at the rough table, and opened the find.

"A letter, just as I suspected!" he exclaimed, glancing at the bottom of the document, and seeing a signature of some kind there.

In a short time he was trying to master the writing—trying to, we say, for he soon discovered that he had no child's task before him.

What he saw was a half-cipher—a mixture of words, figures and marks, and here and there was a combination of them which suggested strange things to him.

The sport became oblivious to everything but the letter he held in his hands. He studied it as he had never studied anything similar before.

"The captain could solve this puzzle, I know he could," he said. "He once told me that he was used to puzzles of all kinds, and that, in fact, he was a human enigma himself. By heavens! I would give anything if he would show up to-night."

The young man suddenly gave up the task. The letter had yielded nothing but more mystery. That it had been written by the Jonah of Tiger Trace he did not doubt, but to whom had it been written?

Not to Morel, of course, for he was dead.

The letter had not been intended for the severed head.

Full-Deck Frank was about to quit the shanty, with the letter in his bosom, when he was surprised by the sudden opening of the door, and a voice greeted him:

"I say, stranger, which is the empty cabin?"

In a second the sport was looking into a face he had never seen before. The face of a man of forty, apparently, the grime of the mountain-trail everywhere on his clothes. His foot-tops were thickly coated with the dead dust of the passes, and his voice was as rasping as his appearance.

"It's the next shanty, if you mean the one where the last tenant lost his head," Full-Deck Frank answered.

"That's what they told me at the Three Angels—a head war lost in the shanty," and the speaker, without more ado, came inside and leaned against the log, showing his fine figure to the young sport, who was eying him with more than passing curiosity.

"Is this the man for whom the letter was intended?" Frank asked himself. "No, it can not be, for he would know the location of the shanty and not be asking for it."

"I told 'em I'd like to stop here awhile, and that if there was an empty hut I'd take it," the stranger explained. "I can't say that I'm afraid of dead men's ghosts, but, then, while I would prefer a shebang with no blood on the floor, you see, I would take that rather than get none."

"Wait, I'll show you the place," and Full-

Deck Frank caught up his lamp and with a final glance at the man's garments led the way to Morel's cabin.

"I guess I'll take it," decided the stranger when he had looked over the room. "It's good enough for Dave Durac."

"Is that your name?"

"Yes, 'Dark Dave' Durac, sometimes. I guess I look the whole name now for I haven't had a chance to wash since I left Hurricane Ledge. Been on the tramp all the time—not because I had to get away from anywhere, but because I wanted to get somewhere and rest up."

Frank turned away and left the man in possession of the shanty. He saw him seat himself at the little table at which the murder had been committed, stayed long enough to watch him make himself at home, and heard him ask how play was, and then saying to himself that Dave Durac's dust wouldn't last very long at the tables of the Three Angels, he had slipped back to his own hut.

Half an hour later Full-Deck Frank, in passing a den on the Plaza, heard a voice which sounded strangely familiar and on entering, saw Durac with his back to the bar telling a group of toughs how times were at Hurricane Ledge.

The man had washed up somewhere, but Frank saw that the mountain grime still clung to his face, that the hands were still dirt-colored despite the application of water, and the eagerness which seemed to peep out of Durac's eyes told that he had at last found the "rest" he sought.

Frank listened to him for a minute and then passed out.

"Dave Durac has lied before," he said with a chuckle. "The boys seem to be swallowing all he's giving them: but they'll find the liar out before he's been here twenty-four hours."

He was on the far side of the Plaza with his gaze fixed upon the wide-open door of the Three Angels when some one sprung to his side and his hand was seized.

"The beauty's come back!" said a voice at his ear.

"No?"

"She has. You know she hasn't shown up since she startled Captain Gold-Dust at the tables. She looks prettier than ever. Come and see her."

"Where is she?"

"At the Angels."

Full-Deck Frank bounded toward the den.

CHAPTER VI.

THE BEAUTY WITH THE WHIP.

THE young sport of Tiger Trace entered the famous den a step or two ahead of the man who had announced the arrival of "the beauty."

As he crossed the threshold his eyes wandered down the aisle between the gaming-tables. The room, which was quite large, was as brilliantly lighted as numerous lamps could light it.

Halting near the door, he surveyed the motley crowd at the games.

"I don't see her," he said to the man who had followed him inside.

"Look in the last corner on the right, standing at the table there."

Frank turned his gaze in that direction, and quickly his face lit up with a flash of recognition.

"I see her," he murmured.

Then for the next five minutes he stood, unmoving, gazing at the young woman. Her face was not turned full toward him, but he could see that to all appearances she was interested in the game going on at the table where she stood.

She was rather tall and graceful of figure. That she was young in years her very poise told him, and that she had come to Tiger Trace for a purpose was also to be inferred.

The sport watched until she moved; then he saw her come up the aisle.

More than one face was uplifted to smile as she passed along.

"Look how she carries herself! Did you ever see anything like it?" demanded the gambler's friend.

There was no reply for the girl had now caught sight of Frank and stopped.

In an instant all color left her face and where the hue of the mountain rose had been was the whiteness of snow.

"Let her pass out," said the friend at the young man's elbow.

The girl fell back, with her gaze fastened on an object the young sport could not see for it appeared to be behind him.

"Gods, it's the captain!"

Frank turned and looked over his shoulder.

Sure enough there stood in the doorway the very man for whose return he had waited a whole week! Captain Gold-Dust had come back and stood in the door of the den looking at the girl whom he had "lost" on a previous occasion.

There was a smile of triumph on the captain's face, a gleam of unconcealed victory in his eye.

The tall figure of the girl seemed to sway with suppressed excitement; all could see that while she gazed at Captain Gold-Dust, her white hands were rigidly clinched.

"Good-night, my child!" saluted the captain, touching his wide-brimmed hat as he moved forward and bowed.

The only answer was a sudden recoil of the girl but the intense black eyes never left him.

"You haven't forgotten how you went off without so much as giving me a chance to compliment your beauty?" continued the Man of Mystery. "You won't serve me a like trick this time, will you?—You know me?"

"I know you, Captain Gold-Dust. I have heard of you beyond the borders of this place. I have seen you when you thought no human eye knew where you were or what you were at. I know some of the most hidden trails of your life. I know what brought you to the Volcanic Mountains. I know what secret you treasure above all you possess. Captain Gold-Dust, when you think I don't know you, you are at fault."

The voice, the attitude of the speaker commanded the attention of all.

"Heaven's what a woman!" muttered Full-Deck Frank.

As for Captain Gold-Dust, he was looking at the young woman with the eye of a serpent scintillating and vicious, but not a muscle of his superb figure quivered.

"I'm glad you know me so well, Cyrene," he returned, speaking her name for the first time. "It's a nice thing to be acquainted. Did you ride the black in to-night?"

At this moment some one from the outside pushed past captain Gold-Dust and stood in the light of the lamps.

It was Copeland!

It was evident that he had not seen the girl until he halted within the den.

The moment his gaze fell upon her a shade of paleness crossed his face.

"Why did you come here?" demanded Cyrene, turning upon Copeland. "I did not want to meet you to-night."

The Gentile of Tiger Trace looked amazed.

"I don't understand this," he protested, looking first at the beautiful girl and then at Captain Gold-Dust.

"Leave this den of human tigers!" cried Cyrene. "Even now you stand in the shadow of the noose."

"Full-Deck Frank stared at the girl. "In the name of Heaven, what does she mean?" he said to himself. "I would give Copeland the same advice if I were asked for it, but to have it come from her at this time and place is what puzzles me."

Captain Gold Dust broke into a laugh and looked sharply at Copeland.

"Good-night, gentlemen!" said the beauty of the mountains, turning to the men at the tables. "I wish all of you the best of luck with no cold decks against you and with not a losing card in your hands."

She took a step toward the door and would have reached it if the left hand of Captain Gold-Dust had not fastened upon her arm.

She shrunk from the touch, and for a moment looked into the desperado's face, but before she could speak, the hand was torn from Cyrene's arm and flung aside violently.

"Let the lady pass out!" It was Copeland who spoke.

In an instant the man from the mountains had whirled upon the other.

"How dare you touch me—you young Jonah of Tiger Trace?" he hissed.

Copeland had stepped back and was now standing in the middle of the aisle, his fine figure drawn to its truest height.

All saw that Captain Gold-Dust had placed himself in the door and that his tall, giant-like form effectually barred the girl's way to the outer air.

"Let it come," thought Frank. "Copeland is no match for Captain Gold-Dust."

Not a card was falling in the room at this time; one-half of the gamblers were either on their feet or had turned on their stools and were looking at the participants of the scene near the door.

The life of more than one person seemed to hang on the coming seconds.

Cyrene's face flushed when she saw Copeland pushed back by the hand of Captain Gold-Dust, and her own hand dropped to her side and seized there the black handle of the rawhide riding whip which was suspended from her waist by a belt.

Once more and suddenly she went toward the door, her eyes fixed upon the mountain bravo and her fingers clasp the handle of the whip.

"Ten to one that he won't let her out," whispered the man who had not abandoned Full-Deck Frank.

"If he don't there will be blood."

Seconds seemed minutes to the witnesses.

Cyrene was now standing confronting the man in the doorway.

"Captain Gold-Dust—I refrain from calling you by the name you ought to bear—I command you to stand aside and let me pass. I did not expect to encounter you when I came hither. I thought you deep in the mountains where for years you have hidden from the just vengeance of man. If I had thought I would encounter you here, I certainly would not have come.

But, now that we have met, let me out—let me go back to the hills where one is free."

"He won't move," said Full-Deck Frank, under his breath. "The captain is determined the beauty shall not again slip through his fingers."

Captain Gold-Dust kept his place; but a change came, and so quickly that the gamblers who were still seated leaped to their feet with exclamations of astonishment.

The beauty of Arizona had whirled the lithe whip above her head.

Once, twice, three times it cut across Captain Gold-Dust's face in bewildering succession.

Blood spurted at each stroke, for the rawhide laid open the skin with the keenness of a razor. The captain, instead of falling back, sprang forward, grinding his teeth, but smiling like Lucifer the while.

Copeland had rushed up and arrested the hand of Cyrene on the fourth stroke, but she tore loose from his grip and facing him, cried:

"What, you defend that tiger of the mountain? Copeland, you know not who he is!"

"Let her go," commanded Gold-Dust. "I rather like to see her in a rage. By heavens, it helps her beauty!" and he laughed with the blood dyeing his cheeks and running down through his beard.

Cyrene would have struck again if, at that moment, she had not seen a way to the door, and in an instant, stood on the threshold facing the crowd once more.

"I hope I haven't marked that man for life," she said. "He is marked already, and by the brand of murder! Gentlemen, I bid you all good-night!"

Captain Gold-Dust hurried to the door but the brave girl had vanished.

"Through his fingers once more!" remarked Frank to his companion. "I don't think she is destined to stick."

"Not while she can wield the whip like that. Look at the captain's face. The girl has spoiled what beauty he had and—"

"What will you have, gentlemen?" called a voice at this juncture. "I am a man of peace and good will to all men, and at Hurricane Ledge we generally follow such scenes like the one we have just had with a drink all around."

The men of Tiger Trace looked at the speaker who had slipped into the place without having been noticed, and now he stood at the bar facing the whole crowd, for he had included all in his invitation.

Gold-Dust looked at the man scrutinizingly.

"Come up; all of you, and drink at the expense of Dave Durac of Hurricane Ledge."

In an instant Gold-Dust's countenance changed.

"It's some new fool with an overplus of dust," he decided, and with a forced smile went forward with the rest.

If he could have looked into the future a few hours there would have been another "scene" beneath the roof of the Three Angels.

CHAPTER VII.

A NEW MYSTERY.

"WHEN did that man reach Tiger Trace?"

"He came in to-night."

"Calls himself Durac, eh?"

"Yes."

Captain Gold-Dust was silent for a moment. He and Full-Deck Frank had walked from the Three Angels after the treating and were in the latter's hut where the Man of Mystery had washed the blood from his face and applied bits of court-plaster which, while they hid, showed where the cutting lash of Cyrene, the beauty, had fallen.

"So Durac has taken the house of the severed head?" he continued, at which the young sport nodded.

"He was almost compelled to take it if he wanted a shanty, for it was the only decent one in camp that was empty. I consider him an adventurer who will quit Tiger Trace the moment his dust gives out, which will be soon from the manner he seems to be getting rid of it. Durac is one of those tramp sports who are never at rest anywhere. You've met them, captain?"

"A thousand times," was the reply. "But let us go back to the young Indian and the girl who came in the nick of time and rescued him from the mob. Wild Winnie has a way of dropping into the play when she isn't needed in it, hasn't she?"

"Yes. She takes queer notions sometimes. No one knows much about her past. I am sure I do not, and what is more, I don't intend to exert myself to obtain any information in that direction."

"You don't fear the girl, eh?"

"Not that, but I don't want to rile her in any way. A person with a mad head on her shoulders is liable to commit some singular act on slight provocation. Do you ever run across Wild Winnie in the mountains?"

"I've caught sight of her. She never gives any one a chance to know much about her. As you say, she comes and goes whenever she likes, takes a hand in whatever game she wants to enter without permission, and plays Old Nick generally. From what I do know of her, and

that is very little, she will shoot at the drop of the hat."

"I saw that in her eyes when she faced the four men who had covered Owlet."

"A strange creature," mused Captain Gold-Dust.

"Stranger than the beauty called Cyrene?"

The Man of Mystery started.

"I don't know, Full-Deck. Both are strange women. Heavens! did you notice Cyrene's eyes when she raised the whip?"

"I could not see them from where I stood."

"They didn't seem to flash one bit. No, they had a cold, gray glitter, like that you sometimes see on steel."

"Dangerous eyes, those, they always say."

"Yes; but wait. I shall get even with the beauty of the mountains. This is the second time she has slipped through my fingers, but the next time I think I shall hold her."

The last sentence was followed by a laugh and Captain Gold-Dust ran his dark hand through his beard.

"What have they done with the severed head mystery?"

"Nothing."

"Are they going to let it drop?"

"I think they are."

"Whom do they say the dead man was?"

"Copeland is the only one who seems to have discovered anything about him."

"Young Copeland?" cried Captain Gold-Dust with some bitterness, which did not escape the man who listened. "What has the Jonah of Tiger Trace found out about the headless man?"

"He discovered in the shanty, after the killing, some papers which seem to have given him some information, for he told me that the victim was a detective."

"What brought him to Tiger Trace?"

"Copeland did not seem able to answer that."

"A detective, eh?"

Full-Deck Frank was looking curiously at the man from the mountains.

"Look here!" suddenly cried Captain Gold-Dust. "Seems to me that young Jonah is making himself too fresh in camp. Why don't some of you curb him?"

"As yet he hasn't caused any trouble."

"But you know what they call him?"

"Yes."

"He won't play?"

"No."

"His hair is too fine for Tiger Trace. Once or twice I've seen him in the mountains."

"Alone?" asked Full-Deck Frank.

"Once, though at a distance, I caught him with another person, but whether that person was Wild Winnie or Cyrene I could not say; both had vanished before I got a chance to investigate."

"You know what he did to-night?"

"He took a hand in the game and was told by Cyrene that he stood in the shadow of the noose."

"What did the girl mean?"

"She knew, no doubt."

"But no one has accused Copeland of any crime."

"Not yet at any rate," smiled Captain Gold-Dust; "but the unexpected may happen at any time in this camp."

As he finished he rose and stood in the light of Full-Deck Frank's lamp.

Without a word he passed to the door, which he opened and stopped on the threshold with his eyes turned toward the shanty of the severed head.

There was a light in the window into which he could look from the door of Full-Deck Frank's hut, and he saw the figure of a man beyond the light.

In an instant he fell to studying the man seated quietly at the table in the fatal hut.

It was Durac!

The Man from Hurricane Ledge had come back to his new home from the treating scene at the Three Angels and was the sole occupant of the cabin.

The tin lamp that burned on the table before him showed off his figure to advantage to the man who watched it with such curiosity, and for some time the burly form of Captain Gold-Dust did not move, but was eyed all the time by Full-Deck Frank, who seemed to know what had attracted the captain.

Presently Captain Gold-Dust left the doorway, and crept cat-like toward the other shanty.

Full-Deck Frank sprang from his chair and followed his gliding figure through the shadows until he saw him halt within ten feet of the window where he stood watching the Man from Hurricane Ledge.

It was a strange tableau. Had Captain Gold-Dust suddenly seen something familiar about the man in the shanty?

Was Durac some enemy in disguise?

All at once Captain Gold-Dust wheeled and came back to Full-Deck Frank's side.

"I was just taking a look at the Hurricane Ledge citizen at home," he said, with a smile. "He is taking things quietly in the hut and the ghost of the man called Morel don't seem to disturb him. I count him a pigeon worth plucking by you fellows, and if you let him get away with any feathers it will be your fault."

"We'll take care of him, captain," was the reply, and the figure of the Man of Mystery fell back as he held out a hand to the young sport.

The next minute the captain was walking off, followed by the eye of the youth left behind, and when he had vanished Full-Deck Frank stepped from his own hut and moved toward the cabin of the severed head.

Durac still sat at his table engaged in looking over what appeared to be a note-book.

There was something leonine in the smooth face of the Man from Hurricane Ledge, and Full-Deck Frank watched him for some time, or until he put the book away and looked up.

It suddenly seemed to the young sport that he was not the only person watching Durac with such interest. The near presence of some one took such possession of his mind that he turned and looked around.

What did he see?

In front of the shanty of the lost head stood a figure, at sight of which the gambler of Tiger Trace almost lost his own.

It was the figure of a woman.

Full-Deck Frank could see her distinctly, for not more than twenty feet separated them and the brilliant starlight falling over the scene enabled him to see more than the mere outlines of the form.

Cyrene or Wild Winnie?

Full-Deck Frank looked at the creature as he had never eyed woman before. He saw that she was leaning forward in her eagerness to see the tenant of the place and that her eyes saw nothing but the figure they had singled out.

All at once the watchful one took a quick stride toward the shanty door and Full-Deck Frank saw that something was gripped in one of her hands.

"It is Cyrene!" he exclaimed. "It is the beauty who whipped Captain Gold-Dust."

It was the sudden movement which had caused him to identify the person in the starlight, and he saw her near the window, so near that one of her hands rested on the rough sill.

Presently there was borne to Full-Deck Frank's ears the sound of gentle tapping and he saw that the woman at the window was tapping on the pane.

In a moment the door opened and the young sport beheld Durac between him and the lamp.

"Not a word," he heard Cyrene say. "I know you and that is enough. Take this and don't fail to obey its instructions," and a paper was thrust into Durac's hands and the speaker turned away.

Durac seemed to stand bewildered in the door.

"One moment," he suddenly cried to the flying woman.

"Not one. You have enough in your hand!" came back through the starlight.

The Man from Hurricane Ledge looked after her and smiled; then he went back into the cabin, and Full-Deck Frank, bending eagerly forward, saw him open the paper.

He read a moment, his face seeming to change color; then all at once he jerked his bat from the wooden peg in the log and sprang from the fatal shanty.

Durac vanished in the same direction taken by the woman.

Ten minutes later he came back. There was on his face, as Full-Deck Frank could see, the look of one who had failed.

"She got away from him," thought the young sport. "Cyrene did not let Durac overtake her. What is this new mystery?"

He was answered in a manner that almost startled him out of his boots.

Suddenly the night air was cut by a series of yells that chilled his blood, and the next moment the tramp of horses was heard.

Men poured out of every den in Tiger Trace and filled the air with oaths and shouts of defiance.

"Owlet and his Red Ravens have come!" said Full-Deck Frank. "This night decides the fate of the camp."

CHAPTER VIII.

THE DOOM OF THE CAMP.

THE RED RAVENS!

Owlet and his band of red-skins had long been the accounted guardians of the secret of the Lost Presidio.

It was claimed by the men of Tiger Trace that the Indians knew the exact location of this wonderful mine; that they had entered into a terrible compact to guard it from all white men; though some said that Captain Gold-Dust had found it, despite the Red Ravens, and that he obtained his wealth from its depths where nuggets, mined hundreds of years before, were supposed to lie in heaps.

The young Moqui chieftain and his band had never had the good will of the toughs of the mountain camp.

Owlet had been watched like a hawk to and from Tiger Trace; had been followed into the mountains as far as the courage of his trackers would take them, and some of those who had tracked the young red-skin had never returned to tell the tale of their mission.

The yells which startled Full-Deck Frank told him that at last the Ravens had swooped down upon the camp.

When the young gambler saw the denizens of Tiger Trace pouring out of the dens, with revolvers gripped in bronzed hands, and heard shouts of defiance welling from their throats, he realized that a fight to the death was at hand.

In another moment he had caught sight of a dozen figures on horseback, the Moqui yell of battle was repeated, and then the air was shaken by the loud reports of fire-arms.

The men on the Plaza were firing at the Indians; revolvers were flashing right and left, and the red-skins seemed to be taken aback by the sudden and hot resistance of the mountain toughs.

Full-Deck Frank before he left the spot glanced toward Durac's shanty.

The door stood wide, and in it the dark-shirted figure of the Man from Hurricane Ledge.

A sudden thought inspired the young sport.

"The Ravens have swooped at last!" he cried, appearing before Durac and clutching his sleeve. The man smiled.

"What brought them?" he asked.

"An old grudge. You may not have heard, but Owlet and his reds are the holders of the secret of the Lost Presidio."

"What is that?"

Full-Deck Frank could not suppress a cry of wonder.

"What, haven't you heard anything about it?" he exclaimed.

Durac shook his head.

"I can't explain now. This swoop means a fight to the death. The fate of Tiger Trace must be settled to-night. Yonder are the only enemies we have. You are one of us, and—"

"Wait!"

Durac sprang back into the shanty and picked up a revolver.

"If I am one of you, I will do my part," he said, coming back to the young gambler. "How many Indians have we to fight?"

"Owlet and thirty three, if all have come."

"And we outnumber them two to one?"

"More than that, but—"

Full-Deck Frank did not complete the sentence for a bullet whistling past his head had thrown him back and nearly off his feet.

"Look out!" said Durac with a light laugh.

"We have to make a circuit of these shanties to get to the main band of fighters. Lead the way; you know it best."

Full-Deck Frank immediately led the way to the Plaza in a roundabout trail and in a little while the two came upon the men of Tiger Trace who were firing at the moving forms of their foes. The Indians had opened fire with a vengeance and half a dozen forms lay on the ground, while over them stood the living, pouring the contents of Winchester and six-shooter into the enemy.

Bullets flying everywhere broke glass in every direction, and several entering the Three Angels played havoc with the bottles behind the bar and broke a lamp.

In an instant, as it seemed, the burning oil lighted up the whole interior of the den. It ran along the floor and fastened upon the dry timbers; the seething flames, bent on the den's destruction, licked up everything they met, and the owner of the place in a frantic attempt to save what was most valuable, fell headlong on the step with a bullet through his head.

Five minutes had not elapsed ere the whole of the famous saloon and gaming den was a mass of fire. Its burning lighted up the whole Plaza and the Indians, seeing by the glare the forms of their foes, poured into them a volley which seemed to cut down fully one-half.

Durac appeared to the men of Tiger Trace with the coolness of a cornered desperado.

Men fell on either hand, but he was not harmed.

He would advance boldly at the foe, and standing in the fierce light of the burning den, would discharge his revolver, nor listen to the calls for him to be careful of his own life.

The fight for existence lasted twenty minutes; more than one-half of it was fought to the roaring of the flames, which, leaping the narrow street alongside the Three Angels, caught other shanties and enveloped them in fire.

It was impossible for the toughs of Tiger Trace to fight to advantage when thus exposed, so they fell back to where the glare did not penetrate, and after a brief stand there retreated again until they found themselves on the outskirts of the camp.

"We are wiped out as a camp," said a voice at Full-Deck Frank's ear.

"You're not very sorry, I suppose?" he answered, turning upon the speaker and looking him in the eye.

"Why not?"

"Because you've been the curse of Tiger Trace ever since you entered it. Copeland, if I were you I would join yon band of red murderers and bring evil and destruction upon them."

Copeland, whose pale face was shown by the burning of the cabins, made no reply, but looked at Full-Deck Frank with a strange smile at his lips.

Just then the giant figure of Monte Mack was seen advancing toward the couple.

"Here he is at last!" cried the tall man, fixing his eyes on Copeland. "I always said that the

Jonah would bring about the doom of Tiger Trace and that's just what he's done. Look yonder, young man. The camp destroyed and fifty men dead!"

Copeland did not quail. He stood before the bully of the camp apparently unarmed, for though Full-Deck Frank looked, he could see no weapons about him.

"You don't like Jonahs, do you?" continued Monte Mack, addressing the young gambler.

There was no answer.

The next moment the hands of Monte Mack fell upon the shoulders of the young men and in an instant he was marching them away.

Copeland looked over his shoulder at the giant of the camp, but offered no resistance.

"I want a witness to what I am going to do," said Monte Mack, halting in the starlight some distance from the last blazing hut. "This is no time for trials—no hour for the slow vengeance of the Vigilantes of the camp. I am Captain of the Avengers of Tiger Trace—the Judge of the Death Tribunal organized in secret a year ago."

He had released the two, but Copeland stood before him with wonder, but calmness in his eyes.

"But for you this would not have happened," he went on, looking into Copeland's face. "Evil came with you to the camp. I am going to kill you, Copeland!"

The last words startled Full-Deck Frank more than they affected the youth for whom they were intended.

"I don't know where you came from, nor just what your mission in this region is. If you have friends they have seen you for the last time. We can't afford to quit Tiger Trace without leaving behind its evil genius. I tried to like you, Copeland, but could not. I tried to think that you were what you look, a nice, inoffensive fellow; but I was undeceived against my will. I have seen you abroad; I have watched you in the mountains; and that is why I deem it my duty, as Captain and Judge of the Vigilantes, to kill you where we stand."

Still not a muscle of Copeland's face quivered.

"What, haven't you anything to say?—no prayer to make?" asked Monte Mack, as his revolver came up and looked into the calm eyes before it.

Full-Deck Frank's hand crept toward the one that gripped the weapon, but stopped before they could meet.

No; he would not make an attempt to save Copeland! Why should he?

The doomed man seemed to take a long breath. His glance wandered over Monte Mack's shoulder to where the fire was still licking up everything that came in its way.

Now and then a shot would add something to noises of cracking flames, but it seemed as though the destruction of Tiger Trace was about complete.

"I can't wait here all night," suddenly cried Monte Mack. "What have you to say? Anything?"

"I have been falsely accused; but what more should I have expected here?" said Copeland. "I am not the Jonah of Tiger Trace, but let that pass. I have no word to send to any one. My avenger will know the truth soon enough for you all."

A laugh broke over the lips of the stern executioner of the mountain camp.

"Your avenger! I would like to know who will avenge the body I shall leave to the buzzards."

"Live and see!"

Full-Deck Frank looked once more at the youth at the muzzle of the revolver, but the face was as calm as before.

"That's grit," said he under his breath.

Monte Mack seemed to take another step toward Copeland. One of his hands went out and dropped lightly on the young man's shoulder.

"One—two—"

The third and fatal number trembled on the desperado's tongue.

The next second there came a loud report and Copeland fell back as if thrown off his feet by the force of the deadly bullet.

At the same time the uplifted hand of Monte Mack dropped at his side; Full-Deck Frank saw the revolver slide to the ground to be followed by the sinking figure of the giant executioner.

Copeland, standing erect, was gazing at the figure at his feet.

Monte Mack did not move after striking the ground.

With a cry over the sudden change in the drama, Full-Deck Frank wheeled and looked in the direction from which the fatal shot had come, but saw nothing.

"Who did that?" he exclaimed, springing to Copeland's side.

"I don't know."

"But the death shot was fired by some friend of yours."

"Seek the truth yonder, then, for I swear in the sight of high heaven that I can not answer you!" and with a glance at the dead form of the Captain of the Vigilantes, Copeland walked away, leaving Full-Deck Frank alone with the perforated heart.

"Strangely protected; but wait! the secret shall yet be mine!" he said.

CHAPTER IX.

SHADOWS AMONG THE RUINS.

OWLET and his Red Ravens rode back over the mountain trails, leaving behind them a scene of destruction.

Tiger Trace was not the place they found it. The torch seemed to have finished what the bullet spared.

There were scorched and half-burned bodies where the flames had swept, and over the once lively camp hung a pall of smoke, which was a shroud for the desperate dead.

The Indians had not escaped unscathed, though they had had the advantage from the initiative of the swoop.

They carried back over the hills, with the loot of the gold-camp, the bodies of a dozen warriors, which were taken to a secluded spot in the very heart of the volcanic hills, and hidden from wolf and vulture.

When the sun came up it looked down upon a desolate scene.

Here and there, sometimes singly, but oftener in ghastly little groups, lay the sports of Tiger Trace.

The camp seemed to be inhabited by no one but the dead. Smoke still crept skyward from the smoldering ruins, and dark specks in the heavens marked the scavengers of the mountains getting ready for the feast spread for their beaks by red vengeance.

By and by men came sneaking back into the ruined camp. These persons had a hunted look, and their hands gripped revolvers while they glanced in the direction taken by the Red Ravens, as if they expected to see them ride back, and swoop once more upon the now defenseless spot.

The survivors of the swoop cheated the vultures by burying the dead, after which they gathered on the Plaza and swore as tough an oath of vengeance as ever was sworn by mortal man.

Then and there they organized themselves into a band of vengeance-hunters, and promised one another, with uplifted hands, never to turn from the trail until every member of the Ravens had paid with his life for the massacre, for the destruction of Tiger Trace was little less than such.

While these proceedings were going on, Full-Deck Frank, who stood with upraised hand with the rest, noticed that neither Copeland nor Durac had come back.

He remembered that the last he had seen of the Man from Hurricane Ledge he was risking his life in front of the cowering forms on the Plaza, eager to get a shot at the Ravens; but now he was missing, and his voice was not to be heard with the voices of the oath-takers.

As for young Copeland, who had been so startlingly rescued by the unknown marksman, at the very muzzle of Monte Mack's revolver, he did not expect him back in camp.

There were hoarse mutterings against the welfare of the Jonah of Tiger Trace, and if Copeland had come back he would have found himself in dangerous quarters.

Full-Deck Frank had not told the true story of Monte Mack's death, preferring to keep to himself, for the present, at least, the secret which was shared by but three living persons, Copeland, the slayer, and himself.

Tiger Trace was practically destroyed. Here and there stood cabins which could have sheltered a few, but they were not put to this trial, the desperadoes swearing not to rebuild until they avenged the doom of the camp.

They erected on the Plaza, in full view of the trail by which the Ravens had entered the camp, a post upon which they nailed a bit of black goods, and beneath it wrote in large letters a threat which told the purpose which from that dread hour would animate them all.

This done, they filed out of camp and turned their bronzed faces to the hills.

Night came and hid once more the ruins of the desperadoes' roost.

It brought back a man from the West and who sneaked forward with velvet tread and eyes on the alert, and who did not stop until he stood on the very site of the shanty of the severed head.

"Hands up!" cried a voice, and the man looked to the left and then elevated his hands above his head.

The next moment another man came out of the shadows and with leveled revolver approached him.

"Kind of lonely here just now?" said the first man with a smile. "I thought I would come back and take a look at the work of the red fiends. Pretty complete, eh?"

The speaker was Durac, the Man from Hurricane Ledge.

The other, who was Coldgrip Dick, tall and burly, like Captain Gold-Dust, seemed taken aback by his discovery.

"There ain't more than ten of us left. Never saw such a wipe-out in all my life."

"How many Ravens got away?"

"Pretty near every one, I guess. The devil helped his own this time, sure. You warn't hyer when we took an oath to stick together till we had paid 'em back with compound interest?"

"No; I wish I had been."

Coldgrip Dick surveyed Durac from head to foot and seemed to see the grime of the volcanic trail that looked fresh on his garments.

"Somehow or other, I came straight to this spot," said Durac. "Here is whar the shanty of the lost head stood, eh?"

"Right hyer," replied Dick with a motion of his hand. "It war a queer case, that."

"Very. Morel seemed to conduct himself like a gentleman, didn't he?"

"Yes; but he had an enemy for all that; if he hadn't, I guess his head would still be on his shoulders. But there was one strange thing about the mystery, and I don't know of any other man who noticed it but myself."

"What's that?"

"Morel hadn't very long hair when he came ter Tiger Trace and when he war found dead, that is, when the head war discovered on the table, the black hair fell round it to the boards."

Durac said nothing.

"I thought that kinder strange," continued Coldgrip Dick. "Some of the boys seemed to notice it, but no one said anything and we let it pass."

"He was here a week before the tragedy took place, wasn't he?"

"Just a week."

"The hair of some people grows very rapidly."

"I know it does, but I thought it hardly probable that his grew so much in that time. But, then, Copeland pretends to have discovered that the man was a detective and that might account for the cheat."

A smile seemed to come to Durac's face.

Suddenly he looked into Dick's eyes and said:

"What's your theory, Dick?"

"About the severed head?"

"Yes. Who killed Morel, the detective?"

The handsome survivor of the deadly swoop shook his head till the long hair brushed his collar.

"I'm no hand at puzzles like that," he said. "I don't think I have any theory, as you call it. Morel simply had an enemy who wanted his head and he got it; that's all."

"The Indian, Owlet, was found in the shanty the next day, wasn't he?"

"So he war, an' if Wild Winnie hadn't shown her hand, thar'd have been a dead Injun in the door."

"Do you think the Indian did the deed?"

"I won't say that I do, though Owlet, the guardian of the Lost Presidio, is capable of doing anything. Morel may have been on the old trail; he might have been looking for the lost bonanza and have been followed by that young red viper. But that's only supposition, you know."

Durac bowed and looked once more at the ruins at his feet.

"Are you going to sleep in the old camp to-night?" suddenly asked Coldgrip Dick.

"I may."

"Then, I leave you with the ghost of the dead. I only happened here when you came, and seeing you, but not knowin' just who you war, I made you throw up your hands."

Dick walked toward the Plaza, passing through a lot of still smoking logs and at the edge of the Square, where so much blood had been shed, he stopped and looked at Durac who had followed him thither.

"If anything red comes back, shoot it," he said.

"I understand," was the reply and the next moment the men had separated and the Man from Hurricane Ledge was the only tenant of the destroyed camp.

For some time Durac leaned against the post in the middle of the Plaza and heard the black flag of the mountain desperadoes flapping overhead.

He stood there with folded arms and thoughtful of countenance, a man with monster will-power as one could have seen even at that hour by looking into his impassive face.

He was not old. If he had passed his fortieth milestone he showed no marks of having done so. His figure was erect and well knit and, strange to say, there was something which seemed to say that he had not been a tough very long.

"It mystifies them all, this severed head does," suddenly said Durac, starting from the post and walking back over the burned ground toward the shanty of the crime. "There is much about it that puzzles me. I wonder who he was, anyhow? They call him Morel because Copeland, the Jonah of Tiger Trace, found somewhere in the cabin papers which told that he was a spotter, probably from the far east—so the toughs say. Some one stole in upon him like a tiger in the jungle and fell upon him before he could resist. They found the head on the table and cut across a dozen times by the knife which had severed it. Dick said to-night that the strangest part of the whole tragedy was the growth of hair. Morel, your locks must have grown out like Samson's?"

A singular laugh followed these words and Durac came to the shanty of the crime.

He stopped there and looked at the ruins. All at once he stopped and took hold of a log which he lifted aside.

His work revealed a part of the rough flooring of the cabin which had been protected in some manner from the fire. In another moment he had pulled up one of the boards, which broke off, having been burned through in the middle, and half a minute later had taken from under the plank something which he thrust into his bosom.

Durac had scarcely done this ere he heard a noise at which he sprang erect and drew his revolver.

It was but a step to an upright log, one which had secured its position by the fiery descent of the roof, and he went to it.

"This is the shanty where it happened," he heard a voice say. "If he had any papers with him he hid them somewhere—probably under the floor. Now go to work and raise the boards which were not burned by your mad fire and see if you can find anything for me."

Durac, hugging the log, looked with all eyes, for the brilliant starlight enabled him to see that two persons were on the scene, and what surprised him still more was that one was a young girl and the other an Indian.

"Don't let anything escape your eye," continued the former. "I must know for certain who he was and what he wanted in this region. I think I know who killed him; and why; but I want the papers he must have brought with him."

The Indian fell to work at once and Durac spake two names under his breath—Owlet and Wild Winnie.

CHAPTER X.

HOW A SECRET WAS LOST.

RIDING through a wild pass in the heart of the Volcanic Hills at the very moment when Durac was watching the two friends among the ruins of Tiger Trace, might have been seen a man with whom the reader is somewhat familiar.

Captain Gold-Dust was quite alone and the horse he rode was moving slowly as if picking his way through the thousand-and-one bits of lava-like rocks that strewn the path before him.

Far above the Mystery's head rose the almost verdureless peaks of the Volcanic Range.

He could not see the tops of the mountains for the uncertain light, but the steed could see well enough and the captain was taking his ease in the saddle.

After awhile he drew rein and the horse stopped and turned his head toward the western wall of the canyon-like pass which they had now entered.

"This is better than getting cut with a whip, eh, Blackstar?" said Captain Gold-dust, patting the arched neck of the steed. "We are safe here as we always are at home," and he slid to the ground and, taking the rein, led the animal to the wall itself.

In a moment horse and rider were entering an opening in the rock and the darkness that prevailed beyond the mouth of the strange place swallowed both.

Captain Gold-Dust continued advancing upward for some time when he turned to the right and after moving in that direction some little distance, stopped and struck a light.

The Man of Mystery was at home.

There was no doubt of this, for the stony chamber which he had entered showed that it was a human habitation, for a table occupied the middle of the place, and there were several stools scattered about in handy attitudes.

The black horse, no longer held by his master's hand, slipped away and disappeared in a part of the chamber where there was no light, while Captain Gold-Dust lighted a lamp and soon had the interior of the mountain retreat well revealed.

"This is like hiding at the bottom of the sea," he laughed. "I did not have to go to Tiger Trace, but go I did, and brought back the autograph of the most beautiful woman out of doors. She looked like a pretty tigress while she plied the lash and I felt every blow to my bones; but it wouldn't have done for Captain Gold-Dust to have whimpered or to have struck her back. Never mind, my beauty; I'll pay you back with interest one of these days, and the date of payment is nearer than you think."

Everything about the underground chamber indicated that it had been in use for years, as, indeed, it had.

This man had made it his home for one knows not how long. To the canyon retreat no living being had ever tracked him. Men had followed him in hopes of finding the trail to the Lost Presidio; but they had found death!

The cavern in the wall was as safe as the bottom of the sea. Red and white alike had failed to find him. He had escaped the eyes of the Red Ravens, as well as the searching look of the men of Tiger Trace.

For some time Captain Gold-Dust stood in the light of his lamp, his arms folded and the gaudy sash he wore falling to his knees. He looked like some Mexican Hidalgo, his dark skin showing off in the light and his dress giving him a rakish appearance.

"Curse the girl, anyhow; the wounds begin to smart now," he suddenly exclaimed. "Full-

Deck Frank said they wouldn't trouble me for some time, but that they would remind me that I had them before they took a notion to heal. I wish I had the beauty here!"

He laughed spite of the pain as he crossed the room and opened a wooden chest in one corner.

"What would they give if they could look in here?" he went on, stooping over the chest and running his hand among its contents. Ay, what would they give if they could see the treasure and the clews I have in this retreat?"

Suddenly he sprang up and, laughing loudly, cried:

"But I'm dead! I was found in the river and the doctors said I had been there for days and they buried me near my father. Dead! I am dead in New York, but alive in Arizona!"

Captain Gold-Dust ceased suddenly and the next moment a noise caused him to grasp the revolver at his belt, but the moment he saw the cause for his start he laughed again.

The black horse had come forward and was poking his nose into his face.

The hunted man stretched out his hand and smoothed the head of his only companion. The horse nickered with pleasure and then with a final look at his master withdrew again.

Half an hour later Captain Gold-Dust shut the lid of the chest and crept to the corridor through which he had entered the cave. He stood there a moment and then went down it, soon disappearing in the dense gloom.

He emerged in the starlight and stood against the rock in the canyon with the night around him. There was not a sound to tempt him further nor anything to make him keep his hand on his weapons.

All at once the captain started and crept back into the mouth of the stone labyrinth.

"Coming, are they?" he said to himself. "Have they actually tracked me at last?"

He stood against the edge of the opening and held his hand on the butt of his revolver while he scanned the shadowy ground outside.

In a little while the sounds he had heard came closer and he fell back and held his breath.

"I'm getting lost in this infamous region," said one. "I think I shall go back and never spend another minute looking for the hiding-place of that gold wizard."

A laugh was the response.

"Into this very canyon I tracked him twice," was the reply. "If I mistake not I lost him somewhere in this very region. There must be a cave here—"

"This whole country is honeycombed with caverns. They are all alike to me."

"Of course we ought not to look for tracks at night and it is a little dangerous following him during the day. But think of the stakes. Beyond doubt Captain Gold-Dust knows the secret of the Lost Presidio. He knows the exact location of the mine which the old padres worked and abandoned years and years ago, and if we could track him to it, why what would we care how often the Ravens destroyed Tiger Trace?"

The man who heard these words started in the dark.

They conveyed to him a piece of news. Tiger Trace had been wiped out. Owlet and the Red Ravens had swooped down upon the camp and blotted it from off the face of the earth.

"Here's a hole in the wall!" suddenly exclaimed one of the men, and Captain Gold-Dust saw him bend forward and poke his bearded face into the very opening at whose mouth he stood.

"Is it big enough for a camp?"

"It looks so."

"Then, let's take it and make it a basis of operations."

"Come on, then."

It was fortunate for Captain Gold-Dust that he was hugging the right-hand wall well, for the two men kept to the left and slipped by him.

"Jupiter! feel how wide the corridor is," said one. "I never saw anything like it in this region."

"That is right," thought the hunted man, "and the chances are that you will never discover another cavern."

He heard the two men pass up the corridor, their heavy boots now and then rolling back some little stones and he followed in his softer leathers, knowing every inch of the way and keeping in the right trail as if the light of day penetrated to the place.

Like a tiger Captain Gold-Dust followed up the incline. He heard their exclamations when they suddenly found the larger cave which he had left darkened, and drawing back, with his hand on his six-shooter, he quietly waited for them to strike a light.

The flash of a match suddenly lighted up the cave.

"Look! a table, Luke!" cried the man with the light.

"And three stools! By Heavens! we have stumbled upon a human den of some sort and the wolves are not in."

The dark-faced man leaning against the stone wall with his blazing eyes fastened upon the mystified men, allowed a smile to pass over his countenance.

He knew that the two hunters were at his

mercy—that they were doomed to drop dead whenever he touched the triggers about which his fingers played; but he wanted to get something from them.

"Well, gentlemen, what was that you were saying about the Ravens and Tiger Trace?"

The two had turned before the sentence was half-completed, and were looking at him in the light of the lucifer which had not fallen to the floor.

"Captain Gold-Dust!" they exclaimed.

The answer was a smile which replied in the affirmative, for the looks of the hunted man with the patched-up face told the story of his identity.

"Light the lamp on the table, please," said Captain Gold-Dust, covering the holder of the match. "There! Now, tell me the story of the doom of Tiger Trace. How many of you got away, and did you succeed in wiping out the young red-skin who led the Ravens?"

The mien of the speaker seemed to reassure the entrapped desperadoes and one told the whole story of the ruin of the mountain camp, Captain Gold-Dust listening with a curiosity he could not conceal.

At the end of the narrative his form straightened and his hands coming up simultaneously, thrust forward the two six-shooters they had not released for a moment.

"You have been seeking my retreat. You have found it," he said. "I never let a living spy return to tell where dwells the Man of Mystery. Gentlemen, you have entrapped yourselves. You have found your tomb, and ages will pass with your fate unsolved."

The pards of Tiger Trace seemed to move closer together and one sent a swift glance toward the table, as if calculating the distance between him and the lamp.

"The trail of the Lost Presidio is the trail of death! It has cost hundreds of lives and is liable to cost as many more. The man who follows me never returns to show his companions the nuggets mined by the Spaniards of old."

Once more the tallest of the men looked at the lamp.

It was not a great spring, but could he beat the swift finger at the trigger?

If the light were out there would be a chance, for no man has the eyes of an owl.

All at once the smallest man was seized by his comrade and sent toward Captain Gold-Dust like a projectile from a catapult.

At the same moment the other sprang at the table.

A stunning report filled the room, then another, the two blending into one as the light was dashed to the floor where it went out like a match and then feet went down the corridor.

All this did not take up the tenth part of a second.

Captain Gold-Dust struck another light and bent forward. On the stone floor lay the figure of a man with a dark spot between his staring eyes.

"The other one has escaped. The secret is no longer mine!" grated the hider of the Volcanic Hills.

CHAPTER XL

DEAD AGAIN.

CAPTAIN GOLD-DUST gazed at the man on the floor of the cavern until the match, having burned to his fingers, was about to drop to the ground.

"Why not?" he suddenly exclaimed in audible tones. "He is my height and weight. The vultures will complete the deception. The wolves of the upper air have helped me before, and they can do so again. I will do it."

The hunted prince of the hide-out lighted his lamp and led the black horse from the underground stall. He next proceeded to strip the dead, and in a short time had exchanged garments with the corpse.

Having done this he threw the body across the steed's back and led him down the dark corridor.

Captain Gold-Dust no longer feared the man who had escaped. He believed that he would put as many miles between himself and the cave as he could, and that he would not be followed in the task he had now on hand.

He guided the horse with its gruesome burden to the very heart of the volcanic canyon. The stars afforded but little light, still, what there was was enough for him, and when he had reached the spot selected in his mind he went to work to complete a cunning deception.

Captain Gold-Dust took the body from the steed and laid it on the ground.

He knew that right overhead a jagged rock projected from the wall, and in a little while he had reached it by climbing the rough rocks.

He now made a rope fast over the point, and descending, made a noose which he slipped over the head of his victim.

The horse aided him in drawing the dead man up to the rock above, after which he took the rope from the girth and attached it to a stone at the foot of the canyon wall.

"The birds will find him and destroy the features before high noon to-morrow," said he, stepping back and gazing up at his work. "I

am dead once more. Captain Gold-Dust has passed out of existence. He is hanging in the heart of Satan's Canyon, and his famous black horse—I don't like to do this part of the job, but it must be done. The deception must be rendered complete."

He walked back to his patient steed with a cocked revolver in his hand.

For a moment he caressed the animal which replied in kind, and all at once he thrust the six-shooter against the head and touched the trigger. The report which followed was a muffled one, but the bullet did its work just as well, for the horse dropped dead at his feet.

Ten minutes later Captain Gold-Dust was going back to the cavern. There he hid or destroyed every vestige of former habitation, and at last went down the corridor and passed out.

He no longer looked like the man who had made for himself a name for mystery and coolness in the wild region. On the contrary, he resembled an entirely different person; but the body swinging in the dark canyon had his garments and looked like the hider of the hills.

Captain Gold-Dust laughed aloud when he found himself far from the scenes of his past life.

He bent his steps toward a part of the country where he knew stood the collected shambles of another mountain city as large as Tiger Trace had been, but without the desperate name of that doomed camp.

Reaching a spur of the mountain, he paused and looked down. A beautiful scene lay before him. A hundred peaks were now shining in the first flushes of another day. He beheld the landscape so well known to him, and fixed his eye upon a collection of huts which he knew to be Wildcat City, whose streets he had often trod as Captain Gold-Dust.

But now he was to tread them as another person. He had no fears of his disguise. He was dead once more, as he had said in the moment of his exultation. He was hanging, food for vultures, in the midst of Satan's Canyon, and the birds of the air would tear the sightless eyes from their sockets and feast on the gallant steed which had carried him for many miles, and through more than one sharp encounter.

The sun was shining on this beautiful scene, when a man covered with the grime of the Volcanic Hills entered Wildcat. No one took particular notice of him, and he walked to the "hotel" on the Plaza without comment.

Wildcat was used to visitors. They came at all hours, for it was known that her gates were never closed to any one, no matter how desperate he was, and within the town were many characters as fierce as the mountain lion.

"They don't know me," he said to himself as he walked into the bar-room where were congregated a score of the toughest inhabitants of the place. "I am truly dead. These fellows who have seen me a hundred times, whose dust I have won, no more know me than they do the man hanging in my clothes in the canyon."

He found that the destruction of Tiger Trace was the topic of conversation, and falling back modestly, he listened to the story of a man who had apparently taken part in the unsuccessful defense of the camp.

There was a tone to the speaker's voice which attracted Captain Gold-Dust.

He noticed that the man wore a bandage around his head, saying that a bullet had scraped his skull in the fight for life, but the wound looked too fresh to be even two days old, and he concluded that the man was none other than the one who had escaped from the cave in the rock.

Wildcat had no sympathy with Tiger Trace. There had never existed a very friendly feeling between the two towns, and at the end of the survivor's tale the listeners said that the Red Ravens probably had some cause for swooping down upon the camp and blotting it out of existence.

"Pretty cool, that," said the captain to himself. "No sympathy here; therefore I won't be bothered with the survivors while I linger in Wildcat."

At this moment the bar-room tenants were startled by the sudden entrance of a man whom some called Blanco Bill.

He was a stalwart fellow at whose heels were immense spurs and before he spoke he emptied a glass which he set down with an emphasis that ruined it for all future uses save to glitter in the sun as a broken relic of the Wildcat bar.

"I say, gentlemen, who do you think I saw swinging in Satan's Canyon as I came through?" he exclaimed, leaning back against the counter and facing the crowd.

There was no answer and Captain Gold-Dust kept his composure, though he could not help leaning forward a mite in his eagerness to hear the story hanging on the lips of Blanco Bill.

"I came upon it almost sudden enough to throw me into spasms, if I was made of that sort of stuff. I saw it swinging in the air, with two vultures already picking out the eyes and others quarreling for a place on the carkiss."

"A man, Bill?"

"Certainly, but a man what all of us knowed. It was the corpse of Captain Gold-Dust."

A strange silence fell over the crowd and from the lips of the man who had just told the story came the first exclamation that broke it.

"Great Jehosaphat!" cried this individual. "I saw him but last night, and now you say you saw him hanging in Satan's Canyon?"

"Didn't I? An' near the spot lay the black hoss, shot through the head, of course by the executioners. The body wore the gaudy sash we know so well and the wide-brimmed hat of the captain with the snake-skin band lay on the ground under the corpse."

In an instant half a dozen faces were turned toward the man from Tiger Trace.

"You saw him last night, did you?"

"Yes, Luke and I found him at home—"

"Hold on thar!" and the speaker, a man who had not been seen by Captain Gold-Dust, stepped forward and looked at the story-teller. "Do you mean to say that you found where Captain Gold-Dust lived?"

"I do. Luke and I found it."

"Were you looking for it?"

"Not exactly. We happened to stumble upon it."

"Whar's Luke?"

"Dead."

"Killed last night, eh?"

"Yes."

"By whom?"

"He fell down a crevice in the mountain, and when I got down to whar he lay he war dead, his brains war scattered over the rocks he had struck."

This seemed to satisfy the questioner, for he stepped back and the man who had found the swinging corpse in the canyon resumed his account of the find.

Captain Gold-Dust listened to everything with a smile at the corners of his mouth.

No one thought of recognizing in the man modestly taking the part of a listener, the redoubtable fellow whose death at the hands of some avenging enemy they were discussing.

The gaze of the man from Tiger Trace did not meet his, and when Blanco Bill had told his story and the crowd had had a drink all around at his expense, the bar-room became deserted and Captain Gold-Dust, wiping his mouth after having drank to the repose of his own soul, passed out upon the porch.

He seemed at a loss without his black horse and wandered aimlessly through the town.

"When a fellow is dead he hardly knows what to do with himself," he said, with a grin. "I knew the vultures would make short work of the body, but did not expect to hear of it so soon. What's up now?"

He saw a number of mounted men ride into the Square in front of the hotel, and noticed among them the man from Tiger Trace.

"Whar's yer hoss?" called one of the men to Captain Gold-Dust, seeing him watching them with wonder and curiosity. "We're going ter cut Captain Gold-Dust down and plant him somewhar. We used ter play with him, and owe him decent burial if some one did kill him, perhaps because he had a right ter."

Captain Gold-Dust said he would like to go along, but that he had no horse, whereupon a steed was speedily secured for him, and he became one of the crowd.

"Going to my own funeral!" he laughed under his breath. "By Jove! this beats any experience I ever had."

The trail leading to Satan's Canyon was known to all the dwellers in the Volcanic Hills, and it did not take the men of Wildcat long to reach it.

As the troop entered the mouth of the canyon, Captain Gold-Dust craned his neck forward to see the loathsome object swinging from the pointed rock.

"Hello! he's been cut down!" cried some one.

The next moment a man was seen to rise from a stooping posture, and, turning, await the troop.

This person stood over something that lay on the ground, and all soon saw that it was the body of a man.

A lot of vultures soared in the blue above the canyon.

The man at the corpse was looking at the company of mountaineers, but not with that scrutiny which Captain Gold-Dust was bestowing upon him.

"Great heavens! I know him now! It is Durac, the Man from Hurricane Ledge!" he cried.

A moment later all had drawn rein around the two men, the living and the dead, and Durac was looking up into their faces.

CHAPTER XII.

TRIGGER AND CLUTCH.

THE man twice dead held back, but occupied a position from which he could see and hear everything.

He saw Durac point down at the body on the ground, and in answer to half a dozen questions simultaneously put, heard him tell briefly how he had found it swinging from the rock and had cut it down after frightening a swarm of vultures from their feast.

The survivor of the massacre of Tiger Trace slipped from the saddle and bent over the horrible spectacle.

"It's the captain, sure enough," he said, much to the real captain's relief.

A singular smile seemed to come to Durac's lips.

"Did you come for the corpse?" he asked.

"We came to bury it."

"All right. It is nothing to me, and perhaps ought to have decent burial, no matter what he has been."

Durac fell back and let the mounted men have their way.

They made a hole at the side of the wall and into it rolled what was supposed to be the corpse of Captain Gold-Dust, covering the disfigured face with the well-known sash. The horse was left where he had dropped at the crack of his master's revolver, and when all was over the party rode back to Wildcat, Durac accompanying them.

"Who did that, do you think?" asked a voice at Durac's ear, and he looked into the face of the man who had brought to Wildcat the news of Tiger Trace's destruction.

Dark Durac shook his head.

"The old captain will be missed at the tables of the mountain dens. He always held a hand not of much account to himself and the boys liked ter fleece him. They say he knew the secret of the Lost Presidio. Do you think he did?"

Durac smiled again.

"If he did the secret is lost forever now unless we might force it from Owlet or some one of his Ravens, and that would be risky work. I'd like to know how they caught the captain and what resistance he showed 'em."

There was no reply, as if Durac had thoughts of his own at that moment, and soon afterward the whole troop rode into the Square of Wildcat and its denizens heard of the burial of the Man of Mystery in the canyon where he had been found swinging with a vulture on either shoulder.

Durac said he was a rolling stone without any real habitation; that one camp was to him as much home as another, and not wishing to take part in the avenging of Tiger Trace, he concluded to spend a few days at Wildcat and then move along elsewhere.

That same afternoon there dropped down into Wildcat a young man whose appearance for a moment startled the person called Valdeck, or Wild Val, though, in fact, he was none other than Captain Gold-Dust.

The new-comer was Full-Deck Frank, another of the few survivors of Tiger Trace, and he said he had come to Wildcat at the request of the Avengers who were camping on the trail to see if they might in an emergency depend on Wildcat for help.

"Not a man!" said the big personage who seemed to be the acknowledged spokesman for the camp. "We don't intend to mix in this fight. It isn't ours at all. Wildcat manages her own quarrels and will not take up those of others. Not a man! Tell yer pards this, but say that we don't send the message with any ill feelings."

Full-Deck Frank moved slowly down the street and was near the Plaza when his arm was touched from behind.

The next moment he was looking into the eyes of his old friend, Captain Gold-Dust.

Was it something familiar in the look that caused him to start slightly, or had the pressure revealed a dark secret which the tall man was keeping from all around him?

"Do you know that the captain is dead?" asked the man twice dead.

"Captain Gold-Dust? Yes, I saw the cross they erected over his grave as I came through Satan's Canyon. Who hung him?"

"That's the mystery that puzzles Wildcat just now. Are you going back?"

"I have to. The boys await the message. The cowards of this camp refuse to help us. You heard them?"

"Yes."

Full-Deck Frank was gazing into the face that almost touched his.

Suddenly a change of color came to his face.

"In God's name—"

"Not a word! I felt that it would not be right to keep the secret from you," broke in Captain Gold-Dust. "I am dead again, the second time I have been so. Don't betray me. I have a mission which, when accomplished, will find us the richest nabobs in the Southwest. Go back to the band, but don't follow their fortunes. The Ravens are too much for them and all will follow the dead of Tiger Trace if they venture to avenge the swoop. I want you with me, or near me, boy. We are sworn pards from this moment. I need your keen eyes and willing hand. Are you with me?"

"To the death, captain!"

"Good-by," and Full-Deck Frank moved off, watched for a spell by the disguised man who turned back and entered one of the dens of Wildcat where he staked a few dollars and lost them with the nonchalance of a young millionaire.

Meantime Durac had taken up quarters at the so-called hotel of Wildcat, a building with

a porch on one side. The Man from Hurricane Ledge sauntered from den to den, now looking over the heads of the players, or swapping stories of mining life with those who had stories to swap.

Captain Gold-Dust entering one of the shanties where the prevailing sport of the camp was in full blast caught sight of Durac.

"It seems to me that I never can get rid of that man," said the "dead man" under his breath. "He haunts me like a shadow, and it seems to me that I have seen him before the day when I found him bending over the corpse in the canyon. I have to meet him some time. Durac, whoever he is, has a mission which will bring us face to face before this drama is played out."

He passed forward and accidentally overheard from Durac's lips a word that sent a thrill through his frame.

"I heard it from a man who came West years ago—a detective I think he must have been. It was one of the celebrated crimes of New York, and the murderer was afterward found dead in the river where he had been floating for days. I don't know how much money was spent in trying to find the assassin before the river gave him up, but that settled the whole thing."

"No it didn't, either," suddenly resumed Durac. "I forget a part of the story the detective told me. The widow of the murdered man, who was a millionaire, never gave up that the body found in the water was that of the murderer, though it was identified beyond question and finally buried in the family lot in the city cemetery. She went from ferret to ferret, hiring all she could get for money to continue the search for him. But of course it was all in vain. What the river had kept in its embrace a week no power could bring back to life, and I guess that the widow's hunt was dropped long ago."

Such were the words that Captain Gold-Dust heard from Durac's lips, and they seemed to hold him spellbound, for he did not move while he listened, though he attempted to assume an air of indifference.

"Did you say that some time after the murder the widow lost her daughter?" asked one of the listeners.

"Yes; it was a year later. The child was ten and was decoyed from home by some one, as is generally supposed, for from that day to this nothing has been heard from it."

"That's as strange as the murder."

Durac allowed his head to nod and Captain Gold-Dust thought he detected in his eyes a light the group around him did not note.

"I see it!" said the outlaw. "We have got to come together. Some day, Durac, we must meet and fight it out to the death. You are my hunter; you have taken the place of Morel, the man who lost his head in Tiger Trace. But why are you spinning that story for the men of Wildcat? What interest can they have in the crime of the New York mansion? Do you expect to discover the lost child in these wilds?"

Dark Dave took from his pocket a black cigar and lighted it at the counter.

"What is the reward?" asked several men as he seemed on the eve of quitting the place.

"For the child?"

"Yes."

"Ten thousand dollars, I believe."

"Nothing for the murderer?"

Durac broke into a laugh.

"Why should there be a dollar out for the man who was found in the river at low tide?" he asked.

The whole crowd jeered the man who had asked the question and he was compelled to stand treat which he did, throwing upon the counter a small bag of dust.

Captain Gold-Dust remained from the group, but stood within hearing distance.

His dark eyes were fastened upon Durac whose face was only now and then visible through the ascending smoke of the black cigar.

"I want the time for our meeting to come soon," he said, cutting the words off with his teeth. "I will bring about a meeting if he plays that cool hand of his much longer. How many ferrets did she send across the Rockies? One has lost his head and now I stand face to face with a second one. You don't believe a word you have said about the identity of the corpse picked up in the harbor. You have deliberately lied to the men of Wildcat. Durac of Hurricane Ledge, eh? That's another!"

A minute later Captain Gold-Dust walked away, followed, as he suspected, by the eye of Durac, and did not check his gait until he stood in the open air.

"Why not now?" he said to himself. "Why not go back and pick a quarrel with the ferret in there? I can kill him with the undershot, a shot known only to me. And after the fight I can tell a story that will 'catch' the wild men of Wildcat and, as Captain Gold-Dust, I can still be sleeping under a lot of stones in Satan's Canyon."

The hand of the man twice "dead" wandered to the butt of the revolver in his leathern belt and stopped there. The weapon clicked.

In another moment he was walking back to the den and his foot was on the step.

The voice of Durac fell upon his ears and set his teeth hard.

"I will make it between the eyes," he said to himself. "I must make it there, for some of these ferrets have more lives than a cat, and this one looks like one of those."

Durac still stood where the captain had left him, but his face was turned toward the door.

As the Man of Mystery crossed the threshold with death in his hand he saw the change the other had made, and at that moment their eyes met.

Already the grip of the Mystery was drawing the six-shooter from his belt; but as the weapon left it a hand closed on his wrist and seemed to sink to the bone.

With a curse which betrayed his intention, Captain Gold-Dust turned upon the interferer, when some one laughed in his face.

In a flash he had recognized Wild Winnie in her grotesque mountain garb.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE FINGER ON THE MAP.

"WHENEVER this mad girl is not wanted she is sure to turn up!" passed through Captain Gold-Dust's mind, and then jerking back and at the same time breaking loose from Wild Winnie's grip, he faced her who had robbed him of another victim.

The half-drawn weapon had dropped back into its leathern pocket; but the eyes of the strange girl told the captain that his intention had been balked much to her delight.

"You must not interfere with my plans," said the man twice dead, in a whisper which no one but Wild Winnie heard.

A smile of fearlessness stole over the white but handsome face before him, and the following moment the girl fell back and let him pass.

If Wild Winnie had not come upon the scene there would have been a drop-shot in the bar-room, but, as it was, with, as he thought, his intention suspected by no one but the interferer herself, Captain Gold-Dust had walked away to watch another opportunity to face the Man from Hurricane Ledge.

What had he seen about Durac that had caused him to thirst for his life with the hot passion of a man-destroying tiger? Did he suspect that when he bent over the corpse in the canyon he had discovered the cheat; that he had penetrated the dead man's disguise spite of the horrid work of the vultures, and that Durac knew that he was still Captain Gold-Dust, the bandit-hermit of the Volcanic Hills?

He did not look back to see what had become of Wild Winnie to whom, as he said under his breath, Durac owed his life.

If he could have swept the interior of the saloon at that moment he would have seen the eyes of the wild creature fastened upon Durac in deep study.

The Man from Hurricane Ledge was also looking at her with curiosity as intense, and after awhile Wild Winnie went forward and stopped in front of the suspected trailer.

Remembering the last time he had seen her among the ruins of the shanty of the severed head with Owlet, Durac smiled and held out his hand.

Wild Winnie without hesitation put into it her tapering fingers, brown and beautiful, and looked up into his face.

The men standing around wondered what this meant, though all knew something about the wandering girl known as "Owlet's guardian angel," but none could guess what tie connected the twain.

"Come," said Wild Winnie in low tones to Durac. "Wild Winnie would talk with the Man from Hurricane Ledge."

Durac nodded and the two went out.

"I have tracked you," said the girl, first looking about them as if seeking a glimpse of the man whose murderous intentions she had just checked. "I have followed you longer than you think because I ought to protect you."

"Why?" asked Durac, returning her look. "Who am I, Wild Winnie, that you should protect me?"

"Copeland."

That was all the answer he received and the name of Tiger Trace's Jonah brought a stare of amazement from Durac's eyes.

"What has Copeland told you?" queried Durac.

"Not much, but Wild Winnie has eyes of her own and she has used them."

The girl was walking with her gaze cast on the ground and Durac could not help admiring her graceful figure and the expression of sadness which long years before had settled over her face.

He wanted to know why she had brought Owlet to the ruins of Tiger Trace after the swoop; why she had made him search the ruins of the tragic cabin.

What was this mad girl of unknown parentage to him, anyway? Why should she suspect that Morel, the man who had lost his head, had left papers somewhere about the shanty?

The more Durac looked at her and thought the deeper grew the dark enigma.

In a short time Wild Winnie stopped at the

door of a shanty which stood ajar, revealing from the narrow street two low stools and a table.

In an instant she had led Durac across the threshold and shut the door.

"Nobody stops Wild Winnie," she said with a sudden smile, seeing mute questioning in Durac's eyes. "We are safe here and the men of Wildcat never disturb me. We can talk here."

Yes, but what would they talk about? What would she tell him?

Wild Winnie had taken one of the rough stools and was looking across the space into his face. She had run her hand through her long locks and thrown them back over her shoulders. Demented? Of course; but what had unbalanced her mind?

These were Durac's thoughts while he waited for the girl to proceed.

"One head lost, another to lose!" suddenly broke out the mad creature.

"What do you mean?"

In response Wild Winnie came forward and passed her hand around Durac's throat. Wherever her fingers touched there seemed a line of fire. Durac wondered if they were always thus.

"Hal one head lost, another to be lost," laughed Wild Winnie. "One head found on the table when the sun comes up; but whose head is it?"

"Heavens! girl, you are right! Whose head was that one?" cried Durac.

Wild Winnie went back to her seat and stared at him.

"White man ought to know," she said at last.

"Don't you know? You seem to know everything that is going to happen in this wonderland. Whose head was that which Pull-Deck Frank found on the table in Tiger Trace?"

Wild Winnie's hand went to her bosom and the next moment she had drawn forth a piece of yellowish paper which she began to unfold, all the time watched with eagerness by Durac. He saw her spread the discolored sheet on the table between them, saw her look at him and then draw a line across it with her finger.

The Man from Hurricane Ledge leaned toward the girl and saw that the paper was a rudely traced map of the United States.

He had followed her finger more than half way across the continent, had seen it climb the Rockies to drop down on the western side and now it rested about where they were at that very hour.

"She began at the eastern seaboard," thought Durac. "To me it seemed that she started at New York, but what does that crazy girl know of the metropolis?"

"Did the white man follow Wild Winnie's hand?" she asked, looking up from the imaginary line she had drawn.

"Not very well," said Durac, hoping she would try it again.

"Once more."

The finger was lifted and carried back over the map. It dropped down at the sea and began its slow march across the country. What a zig-zag line it made! Now it descended to the waste lands of Texas, now crept northward until it almost touched the Black Hills, and at last, dropping southward again, halted where it had halted before.

Durac could see that that finger had followed that same route countless of times before, for there was a dark line on the map like a well-defined trail and it started in at New York and landed where she had stopped for him.

"Did you come out here that way?" asked the Man from Hurricane Ledge.

Wild Winnie started.

"The trail Wild Winnie made was made in a dream," she said. "She knows little of it as her feet found it, but she can trace it across the lands of the West from the sea which to her used to break near the trees of a grove that grew in a city."

"Gods! this creature was once in New York!" cried Durac.

"Are you going to keep your head?" suddenly cried the girl, breaking out into a laugh.

"Why shouldn't I? Do you know who took the head that was cut off in Tiger Trace?"

The girl arose again, and for a moment seemed about to fly from the room, but all at once she bounded forward and her hand fell upon Durac's shoulder.

"Let the white man look into Wild Winnie's eyes and tell her the truth if he tells it at all. Is he the brother of the man who lost his head?"

"I am not," answered Durac, calmly. "But you have not answered my question. Do you know who came upon the man like a tiger? They called him Morel!"

"Morel, ha! ha! and he came from here!" and the hand of the girl going back to the map on the table, alighted where New York was, while she gazed up into Durac's face and laughed again.

"How do you know he came from there?"

"Copeland!"

That name again! It was evident that the young Gentile of Tiger Trace was on intimate terms with the with beauty of the Southwest; that he had met her somewhere in the moun-

tains, and Durac resolved to look into this mystery and get at the bottom facts.

"So Copeland told you, did he? So Morel came from New York? Now, do you know what brought him across the continent?"

"He was sent."

"Ah?"

"He was a tracker, Morel was. He was sent out to find the trail of a man whose hands were red. He found him, but it cost Morel his life."

"And his head besides," smiled the Man from Hurricane Ledge.

There was no reply to this. Wild Winnie folded the well-creased map and put it away.

The following moment a shadow fell across the table, the shadow of a human head thrown by the sun, and both Durac and the girl followed it as it crept up the wall and vanished.

"Watch it!" cried Wild Winnie, pointing where the shadow had disappeared. "It is on your track. The maker of that shadow knows who you are, and why you are here. I caught his hand awhile ago and stopped him. I held him back from the death-shot. I have seen him when he thought no one was looking. I know him!"

She sprung to the door and stood there in the act of opening it with her face turned toward Durac.

"Tell me one thing, for you can," cried the Man from Hurricane Ledge. "I know that you know more about the dead than you want to reveal. Who killed the man who lost his head in the shanty?"

Instead of answering him the mad creature laughed.

"Who are you that you should ask Wild Winnie such a question?" she said. "What is your mission among these death-hills that you should seek to know this? Durac, they call you. What was your name six months ago? What brought you to Wildcat City? Durac, as they call you now, you must work longer without the secret which Wild Winnie carries in her bosom. She dare not speak it here, for the very stones have ears. They found you bending over the vulture-devoured man in the canyon. You had time to examine what the mad tracks left. I need not ask you if you did so? What is your mission? You have seen the cross they have erected in the gulch. 'Here lies Captain Gold-Dust!' Durac, tracker and man of mystery, is that inscription a lie? Beware! A death such as few men die in this wild region is your portion if your mission fails. Remember!"

The door opened and shut and the shadow that fell across the table and went rapidly up the wall was that of Wild Winnie as she left the Man from Hurricane Ledge alone.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE BROKEN SONG.

THE vultures that had been scared from their horrid feast in the canyon by Durac, who had come across the suspended body clad in Captain Gold-Dust's well known garments, came back soon after the burial of the hideous corpse.

Now there was nothing for them to attack but the carcass of the black horse, and in a little while they had stripped every morsel of flesh from the bones.

When they had finished their feast they sat about on the ragged crags and gorged to their full, refused to fly when a rider came from the West and entered the canyon.

The sun sinking behind the wall had taken from the rude cross erected by the men of Wildcat over the grave they had made at its foot, the rays of light which had touched the inscription for a time.

The person who rode toward the grave was a woman whose steel snuffed the tainted air and showed signs of fright.

"It's but a cross, Satan," said the rider in low tones, at the same time bending forward and smoothing the neck of her horse. "It was not here the last time we took this trail. Let us see who has finished his career and has a cross for his headstone, which is more than some get in this country."

In another minute the fair speaker was in front of the cross and her lips were reading aloud the inscription thereon:

"Here Lies Captain Gold-Dust."

"Found Dead in Satan's Canyon, Aug. 10th, 187-."

"Let Him Sleep Unavenged."

"Dead at last!" cried the reader of the cross. "Captain Gold-Dust found dead here? Who killed him? Who erected this cross to the wretch's memory?"

She looked around as if she expected to hear an answer to her words, but the dull sides of the canyon walls sent back in an echo the one word "Unavenged."

"I wonder if they who killed him knew who made the marks on his face? Did he tell them that I whipped him at Tiger Trace just before the Red Ravens swooped down upon the camp and blotted it from the face of the earth, so far as fire and bullets can do so? 'Here lies Captain Gold-Dust!' I don't like to believe this. I don't want to believe that the hermit-desperado of the Volcanic Hills has met his doom at the

hands of some one who should not have taken his life. If he sleeps in that grave, and why should I doubt it?—there is a crime which I fear will forever go unavenged."

Cyrene—the speaker was the mysterious beauty of the mountains—drew back and looked up the canyon.

The shadows had grown much since her coming, and the sides of the place were getting dark. A wind stealing through the long gulch parted her steed's black mane, and moved her own soft ringlets.

Presently there came in sight an object which caused the beauty to look closer, and seeing it creeping down one side of the canyon, as if desirous of hiding from human eye, she drew aside and continued to watch it.

The black horse and his rider were screened by a large rock, and Cyrene, looking out cautiously, saw the figure draw near the grave, and at last halt upon it.

"I don't believe it!" she heard the creeper say. "That villain has more lives than a cat. Dead and quietly sleeping in Satan's Canyon? It is a lie!"

Cyrene wanted to make her presence known, but she held back, wondering what the man would do. She saw him take from his pocket a bit of black stone, shaped like a pencil, and lean toward the cross.

In a moment he was writing there, his body bending over the mound, and when he stood erect there was a grim smile on his face.

"What did you write, Copeland?" said the woman to herself. "What have you added to the inscription on Captain Gold-Dust's monument?"

The young Gentile of Tiger Trace fell back and slipped away. Cyrene watched him till his body disappeared, and then urged her steed toward the cross, and by leaning over read what the youth had traced.

The pencil of Copeland had traced but one line, and that underneath the last one of the inscription:

"Captain Gold-Dust lives to be hanged!"

Cyrene fell back, laughing over what she had read in the uncertain light.

"What sort of a prophet are you, Copeland?" she exclaimed. "How do you know that Captain Gold-Dust still lives, when we see here this monument? Be sure that you do not stretch the truth yourself," and she turned and rode up the canyon.

A lonelier spot for a grave one can not imagine. The whole place was as gloomy as it could be, and when night came with its army of canyon bats that flitted hither and thither, it seemed gloomier still.

An owl perched on the cross and hooted, while others flew about like the flying ghosts of the dead.

Suddenly all this changed. There was a tramp of horses, and in a moment a band of Indians rode into the canyon and their leader drew up in front of the cross.

The others gathered around him and waited while he read the inscription on the monument by the light of the match which he had taken from the little tinder box at his belt.

When he fell back he pointed at the ground and turned to his followers.

"Dig!" he said.

In a moment, as it seemed, a dozen men were at work on that shallow grave, the leader holding a torch over the scene, and in less than five minutes the corpse that filled it was dragged into the light.

The Ravens had disinterred the cheat!

Owlet, the young chief, bent over the loathsome object, and held the light near the vulture-torn features.

"Is this the Man of Mystery?" he said. "Is this Captain Gold-Dust, whom Wild Winnie hates?"

There was no reply.

"Come forward, Po-mar-go."

At this an Indian who wore about his waist a belt of serpent-skins, stepped to where the body lay and looked at it attentively.

"Take the head," said Owlet. "No eye shall see you steal the head of the dead," and at a signal from the young chief, all but one withdrew from the scene.

A few minutes later Po-mar-go, the Moqui doctor, came to where the others awaited him on their steeds, carrying something in a closed sack which he had flung over his saddle.

"Is it done?" asked Owlet.

"It is done."

Owlet sent three men back, and when they rejoined the band the grave had been filled, and there were no signs of recent disturbance near the wooden cross.

"Now to the mountains!" said the young leader of the Ravens, and the red troop dashed away, leaving behind them for a time thousands of wild echoes which kept owl and bat at bay for an hour.

Meantime, Cyrene, the mysterious beauty, had vanished, and no one had followed her. If Copeland had known that she was so near when he gave the written lie to the inscription on Captain Gold-Dust's monument, he might have followed her, but he did not dream that his act had a single spectator.

Cyrene reached a high trail from which she could overlook a wide scope of country which in the daytime was a beautiful landscape, but now, lying under the early stars, it was a blot on the map of nature.

She had slackened the gait of her steed and was riding slowly over this trail when all at once she halted and listened.

What did she hear but a low song which floated up to her from below, and while she listened a smile overspread her face and she said half sorrowfully:

"Whoever killed Captain Gold-Dust, if he be dead, cheated you, Wild Winnie. What's that you are singing—the same old song I have heard from your lips hundreds of times? Why, it's a song of some nursery, and you sing it as if it were the only thing you can remember of a past which seems a wild dream. In heaven's name, what is your past, girl?"

The words which came up to Cyrene's ears were of a childish song and carried her back to a past which she had not entirely forgotten.

Suddenly the air reverberated with the crack of a revolver and that instant the singing ceased.

The report of the fire-arm and the cessation of the weird music were so sudden that Cyrene almost fell from her steed. Her horse pricked up his ears and then looked at her.

The strange beauty waited.

The silence grew more intense, but the singing was not resumed, and as she listened the face of Cyrene grew dark, as if with vengeance.

"A bullet will stop a song," she said aloud.

"In God's name, I trust no one has the heart to shoot the mad creature of the Volcanic Hills. Come, Satan, we must see."

She urged the black steed forward and in a short time both were descending the trail.

Every now and then Cyrene stopped long enough to listen a moment, but with ready revolver she went on again and at last found herself at the foot of the ridge.

"Good heavens!" she suddenly exclaimed, and the next moment she was on the ground bending over a form which lay at the very feet of her steed.

"A thousand curses on the hand that did this!" she went on, picking up the inanimate figure and looking down into the deathly face.

Cyrene struck a match and held it over the features in her lap.

She had found the wild beauty of the Volcanic Mountains. Wild Winnie lay in her arms like one dead, and the longer Cyrene looked down into the staring eyes the whiter grew her own face.

"Copeland, I believe you now," she exclaimed. "There was but one person guilty enough to stop the poor child's song with a bullet, and he did it."

Cyrene lifted the body to her horse and mounted after it; then she rode back over the trail and at last turned into what seemed a mere bridle-path, but which, singular to say, ended in a cave home as well hidden as Captain Gold-Dust's famous retreat.

Not until then did she attempt to bring Wild Winnie back to life.

For a long time her work seemed of no avail, but at length the eyes gave forth a look of returning reason and Cyrene smiled.

But almost instantly the wounded girl fell back into a deathlike trance from which the beauty of the whip feared she would not be able to bring her.

Minutes were lost in hours, but Cyrene, with but little knowledge of a surgeon's skill, wrestled with the death that seemed to have Wild Winnie in its grip.

"Give back, oh heaven, this poor girl's life and take my own!" she cried. "She has a Past to be avenged. She must sometime go back to the blighted home on the far-away seaboard, but I—I can live and die Cyrene, the outcast!"

At last there fell from the lips of the mountain beauty a cry which seemed to have been caught by the victim of the shot, for Wild Winnie threw her arms about Cyrene's neck and drew her down and kissed her.

"Thank God!" cried Cyrene. "She has kissed me before but never like that. It is the kiss of returning reason. Now the story of the past may all be told."

CHAPTER XV.

STRANGELY ACCUSED.

It was a most dastardly shot.

The maker of it did not wait to see Wild Winnie picked up by Cyrene, but turned away with a curse of delight and gave his steed the spur.

"She came between me and my plans too often, and there was no other way to get even with her," he said. "I don't care what becomes of the body. The vultures will find it most likely or the wolves may scent it and have a scrap over her. She won't trouble me any more, and that will be something. If she had not caught my hand when she did in the saloon I would have settled things with Durac of Hurricane Ledge; but she had to come when I didn't want her, and now she has paid for her presumption."

The shadows of cliff and trail hid the speaker, and in a short time he was far from the scene of his dastardly attempt to kill the mad girl of the Volcanic Hills.

About the same hour Dave Durac, in Wildcat City, was in consultation with a young man who had found his way to camp and had discovered him.

The youth was Copeland, the Jonah of Tiger Trace.

The couple occupied stools in the shanty which Durac had secured for a habitation while he dwelt among the men of the mountain camp, and the door was shut.

"I don't know much about her," said the young man. "I saw her for the first time two years ago, or about the time I met Captain Gold-Dust for the first. Wild Winnie is a strange creature undoubtedly insane, but still with intervals of sanity, but these do not last long. She has never divulged anything concerning her past, even if she remembers it. I have seen the map she showed you and she always traces out the same trail she traced for you."

Durac was about to reply when a tramping outside was heard and a knocking fell upon the rough door.

In a moment the faces of half a dozen burly men were seen, and the spokesman, holding in one hand a piece of paper, leaned forward and singled out Copeland.

"This is for you, I guess," said the red-shirted stalwart. "We passed it at the meeting that's just adjourned and we trust you don't think hard of it because we don't want anything of an evil nature to befall Wildcat."

Copeland had already taken the paper with a look of curiosity and was opening it in the light of Durac's lamp.

In another second he lost color and his lips came together in a sudden spasm of rage.

"What is it, boy?" said Durac.

Copeland handed the paper to his companion without a word.

"A notice to quit, eh?" cried the Man from Hurricane Ledge, looking up first at Copeland and then at the waiting and Sphinx-like committee at the door.

"I guess that's it in cold English," replied the tall chairman.

"Does he look like a bird of evil?" and Durac covered Copeland with his finger. "Look at him and say, if you can, that he looks like a person who is in league with the devil and who carries evil wherever he goes."

The men looked at Copeland, but there was no answer.

"Who preferred these charges?"

"We can't tell you that. The Tribunal was convened by order of its head and the testimony was taken in secret as most of its testimony is. That's the verdict you hold in your hand, captain. The young man is to leave Wildcat within ten minutes after receiving the notice and that's all there is of it."

Copeland put out his hand for the paper.

"I don't intend to be the maker of trouble," said he. "But some enemy has followed me ever since I set foot in this region. I have been driven out of camp after camp, as if there were blood on my soul. I have been 'posted' all over this country as a maker of evil and one in league with the fiends of darkness. This is not the first time I have been waited on. When I heard your steps outside this shanty I could have told my friend, Durac, just what they meant. Gentlemen, I will go."

His last words were followed by a sudden touch of Durac's hand on his arm.

"Don't plead for me, Durac," said Copeland. "I am willing to play Ishmael to the end of my life. I guess that is my fate, and why try to fight it? They let me remain in Tiger Trace longer than I had hoped to and you know what happened there."

"Just what we don't want to happen to Wildcat," said the leader of the Committee.

"I understand you. You need not tell me that the testimony heard at the Tribunal was heard in secret, and that you dare not reveal the work of the session. I think I know by whom I have been persecuted and why, but I don't murmur."

Copeland held out his hand to Durac, but the Man from Hurricane Ledge, instead of taking it, stepped to his side and looked at the Committee.

"I'll escort him out of camp," he said to them.

"Beg your pardon, but we war to do that." For a moment the eyes of Dave Durac flashed, but he seemed to see the dark hands that rested near the buckskin belts and drew back.

"I'm ready, gentlemen," said Copeland with a smile, and the next minute he had stepped across the step and stood among the men of Wildcat.

Durac stood like a statue in the center of the shanty with his eyes fixed upon the forms outside, but all at once he sprang to the door and shouted:

"Good-by, my boy. Remember!" and then with a curse shut the portal and laughed.

"That boy a leaguer with the Prince of Evil?" he said. "Yes, some one is on his heels, and why? I will know ere long!"

Not far from the spot where these scenes had

occurred stood a man who grinned when he saw march past him the Committee with Copeland in charge.

"I said I would keep him on the go and he is moving on already. I won't give him any rest till he is ready to give up the fight. I let him stay longer than usual in Tiger Trace because I wanted to watch him and make sure that I was right. While the old captain plays a cool hand, I guess I am able to play one just as cool."

Copeland and his persecutors had disappeared in the starlight, and Full-Deck Frank, the speaker, walked off and brought up in one of the open dens of Wildcat where he refreshed himself at the counter.

Suddenly there fell upon the young man's ears the tread of one who had just entered the place.

Looking up, Full-Deck found himself face to face with Durac.

"The Man from Hurricane Ledge, eh?" he mentally exclaimed. "This is the man the captain wants watched with the eye of a hawk. If he wins his game, he says, we lose ours, and that is not what we want to do."

Durac, taking no particular notice of Full-Deck Frank, came forward and made a selection from a box of dark cigars.

The young man could feel that their elbows were nearly touching, but he pretended to be thinking of something else and did not look around.

Durac smoked awhile in silence and then walked out, leaving a trail of smoke behind him.

"Who is that man?" asked the man who stood behind the bar.

"Durac, from Hurricane Ledge."

There was no reply.

"He's a rolling stone that has stopped here for a season," added Full-Deck Frank.

"He has never been here before, but I haven't forgotten him. I have a memory that is as good as the best and when that man crossed that step I knew who I was to meet."

"You've seen him before, have you?"

"Yes."

The desire that took instant possession of Full-Deck Frank's heart was a strong one.

Alleghany Joe, the barkeeper, knew something about the past of this man from Hurricane Ledge and he was consumed with a desire to know what it was.

"Where did you ever see him before to-night?" he asked.

"East of the Rockies," and then the lips of the barkeeper came together in a manner which told Full-Deck Frank that more information was not to be had from that source, and as if to prove it, Alleghany Joe began to whistle and turned to the bottles on the shelves back of the bar.

An hour later Durac was startled by a knock on his door and when it opened Alleghany Joe stood before him.

The man came forward with a grin on his face and with outstretched hand.

"Human life is full of changes, and I never expected to see you in Wildcat," he said.

Durac fell back from the hand and looked up into the face of the speaker.

"I'll keep the secret which, if let out here, might call another meeting of the Tribunal. I won't give you away, but it is death for one of your kind to spend an hour in Wildcat."

Durac was gazing at the man with wonderment on his face which had not lost one particle of its color.

"Come; I know you don't want to admit the truth, but I have you dead to rights. I haven't seen you since the old Mosby affair and you have changed somewhat; but the eye gave you away and now—"

"In God's name, what do you mean, man?" cried Durac. "Are you mad, or what?"

"They call me Alleghany Joe here, but in the East I used to have another name and you caught me and sent me 'up the river' for three years for the Mosby business."

There was a broad smile on Alleghany Joe's face and he had dropped his voice to a whisper.

"You talk in riddles to me. Be careful; you may give something away to your own undoing."

It was now the barkeeper's time to look amazed and his eyes seemed to bulge from his head and he was looking at Durac with all the intensity of a man thunderstruck.

"What! ain't you Monk Morel?" he said.

Not a muscle of Durac's face moved for a second and then he laughed.

"I am Durac of Hurricane Ledge, my man. Was Monk Morel, as you call him, a friend of yours?"

"No!" the word came out through Alleghany Joe's teeth. "He sent me to Sing Sing and just when I was making a stake for life. But I don't more than half believe you yet."

"Morel? Morel? Why, that was the name of the man who lost his head at Tiger Trace."

"I've heard about that, but did not know his name was Morel."

"They say he was a detective, too, and that he was on a trail when he died."

"I beg your pardon, then; but hang me if I wouldn't have sworn that you were the same man who caught me for the Mosby affair and

sent me up. Good-night, captain; my bar's free to you," and Alleghany Joe walked out.

"By Jupiter! I believe he's lying, after all!" he said to himself. "I believe the man in thar is Monk Morel—I don't care if he did lose his head in Tiger Trace."

CHAPTER XVI.

BACK IN GOTHAM.

It is a long distance from the dark trails of the Volcanic Hills to the lighted streets of New York.

We come back to the city of secrets and of crime and for a spell leave the characters of our story in the wilds of the Southwest with the promise that the thread we have dropped shall not remain out of sight very long, but that we shall return to witness some of the most exciting scenes ever witnessed in a mountain drama.

It is near the hour of ten at night and the brilliant lights of the rich avenues stream far and wide on the palaces of the money kings and now and then touch the rags of the flitting beggar.

In one of the front rooms of a fine mansion sits a woman whose face wears an anxious look. Wealth surrounds her on every side; but there is a somberness about her which tells a story of a darkened past.

Everybody knows that she is the widow of Holden, the millionaire whose murder ten years before was the talk of the town and the mystery of the hour. It was the great puzzle which for awhile baffled the ferrets of the city, and which was not solved until the harbor patrol found drifting in the bay the bloated corpse of a man for whom they had been looking high and low.

This man, called Bolivar Blake, and a nabob like the murdered millionaire, was the supposed assassin. The evidence, enough to hang him twice over, pointed to him with unmistakable finger, and when his corpse was found at low tide the murder mystery was considered settled.

By all but the widow herself.

Her theory that a cheat had been carried out—that the body found in the water was not the body of Bolivar Blake—had cost her thousands of dollars, for she had employed detectives to look for one whom all believed slept in the family vault in Greenwood, and with ten years between her and the terrible crime she had not yet divested herself of her belief.

But it was not the murder alone that had darkened her life.

It had been followed by the loss of her only child, a daughter who disappeared from home nearly a year after the assassination, and of whose fate or whereabouts the best human ferrets had failed to find the slightest clew.

Mrs. Holden alone in her house on the night when we transport the reader back to the city on the seaboard was watching the clock as if expecting a visitor at a certain hour.

She had not forgotten the last man she had put upon the trail.

Still fresh in her mind was the last interview with Monk Morel, who had undertaken the work of carrying out her plans and who with the mysterious map written in chemicals to keep him company, had struck out for the wild region of the Volcanic Hills, there to look for the man supposed by a million of people to be dead and buried.

For some time the rich widow of the avenue sat alone in the house, but at the first sound of the bell she started up and went to the door.

She admitted a closely veiled woman.

When in the parlor her visitor remained standing and did not remove the veil.

"I have come according to my promise," said the veiled one. "Our interview must, of necessity, be brief. I bring news from your ferret."

"News from Monk Morel?" cried Mrs. Holden.

"Yes. He has failed."

For a moment the widow stood like a statue in the middle of the room. Her face lost every vestige of color and her whole form trembled.

"By what authority do you tell me that he has failed?" she said at last.

"Never mind that. I am not here to reveal the secret source of my information. Your man lost his head."

"He was said to be the coolest detective in New York. I had tried a score, but he impressed me as one whom I could trust in every way, and I sent him to the trail with well-fed hopes that he would unravel the mystery."

"He was cool to the end. He did his work well, but there was one shrewder and cooler still. When I say that Monk Morel lost his head I mean they found it one morning standing on a table while the body lay on the floor."

"My God!"

Mrs. Holden fell back with the exclamation on her lips and showing signs of a swoon, but she recovered and came forward again.

"If you know this you know who sent me the combined letter and map—the map written with chemical ink so that it could not be read only when held close to the light."

"I do, madam. I sent you that letter."

"Then you are responsible for the death of my detective."

There was no reply, but the widow saw a faint smile at the corners of the mouth just visible through the lower edge of the veil.

"I will not let this discourage me," Mrs. Holden said. "I will send another to the trail. I have money enough to buy the best detective talent in the world. I will send man after man to the West until they have solved the Holden Mystery, for its solution lies yonder among the mountains and plains of Arizona."

"Madam, you send your man-hunters to their death," slowly spoke the hidden lips.

"Some one will find the trail and run it down."

"Impossible!"

"I will make you tell what you know. I will force from your lips the secret of the crime that has darkened my life and made me more than widow."

A low, scornful laugh came through the veil.

"What if the letter and the map were parts of a false play?" said the Unknown. "What if I sent your ferret to his death among the Arizona hills?"

"Did you do that? Are you in the plot which years ago took from me husband and child? If I thought you were, you should not quit this house alive."

A quick spring took the millionaire widow across the room and the key of the door which she reached clicked in the lock.

"We are alone in this mansion," she said, turning with a triumphant look upon the veiled woman. "We stand face to face until you reveal to me the truth—till you give me the clew you carry in your bosom."

"A nice way you have of getting at secrets," laughed the other. "Madam, you have no power by which you can unloosen this tongue and force from me the story you want to know. Of your child I know nothing; beyond this I am silent. Your sworn ferret, Monk Morel, left his head in an Arizonian cabin, but they buried both head and body together and the shanty of the severed head is a shunned hut and a hated spot."

The speaker went toward the door and the hand of the widow fell upon the knob while she looked at her with flashes of defiance.

"Let me out!" said the woman in the veil.

Her hand came forward displaying a white wrist which wore a serpent-headed bracelet, and the millionaire's widow saw that along the marble skin lay something that glittered in the light of the gas.

The next moment the stranger's hand fell upon the widow's wrist and the hidden face crept forward until she could see the glowing eyes beneath the veil.

"I deemed it my duty to tell you that your hunter lost his head on the trail," she said. "I have told you, now open the door."

Mrs. Holden turned the key in the lock—turned it almost mechanically; she opened the door and looked once more at the woman with the knife along her wrist.

"I know you. It was said at the time that Bolivar Blake had a wife whom he married in secret. You are that woman!"

A laugh that shook the black veil was the response.

"I will have you hunted down! There are in this city ferrets as good as Monk Morel. They will want to avenge his death and they can do it by running you to earth. Besides this, I swear that I will send to the Arizonian trail another detective who will not lose his head but who will ferret out the man who cheated the whole city with a lie. The street is yonder. Beware! You may be tracked from this very house."

The Unknown dropped the widow's hand and sprung into the hall.

"All the detectives you may employ will be baffled," she said. "I thought I would start one of them on the right trail. If he lost his head, well and good. Another may follow him. As to myself, your best bloodhounds will never find me. I am Ione the Invisible. I know the secret of the past. I come and go and the shrewdest ferrets have failed to track me."

"But why did you send me the map and the letter?"

"I wanted to see what your best detective could do."

"His blood is on your head!"

"And on your hands, for was it not you who sent him to his death because of the decoy map?"

There was no answer. Mrs. Holden was watching the woman and wondering if she would not come again when she could be better prepared for her.

"What will be your next mission?" she asked, at length.

"Perhaps to tell you of the fate of another ferret of your hiring."

"Then, you will come again."

"It all lies with you, madam. What is a secret now will be one forever."

Half a minute later the carved door of the Holden mansion opened and shut, and the mil-

lionaie's widow stood alone among the shadows of the hall.

"That woman shall be hunted down," she cried, clinching her hands. "She holds in her bosom the secret of the trail. She knows that my detective has failed—that he lost his head in the heart of the wild Southwest. I will send out another. I will not let this veiled secret-keeper baffle me. My life is devoted to vengeance. Every dollar that I have I will spend on the trail. There is a link connecting the two parts of this drama; an unseen cord stretches from mountain to metropolis."

Eva Holden passed a sleepless night.

The next morning the office of one of the keenest detectives was invaded by a woman, who stepped out of an elegant carriage and ran up the steps.

A smile appeared on the ferret's face when he saw who his visitor was.

Half an hour later Mrs. Holden was escorted down the steps and into her carriage.

"We can't take commissions for people like that," said the detective to his assistant when he re-entered his office. "The widow of Colonel Holden is a harmless lunatic. She now claims that she was visited last night by a veiled woman, who told her that Monk Morel, the man she sent West, had lost his head in a wild-West camp. The idea of a ferret like Morel literally losing his head, is preposterous."

"How did you get rid of her?"

"I pretended to promise that we would take care of the veiled creature, and look into the severed head business, and that satisfied her."

"Nothing seems to break her disbelief of Bolivar Blake's death."

"Nothing. Why, the murderer is dust long ago, and Morel, no doubt, is following other trails beyond the Mississippi. We don't hunt dead men for mad widows," and the detective resumed his work at the little desk in the corner.

CHAPTER XVII.

A MAN-HUNTER SETTLES A QUESTION.

THE ejection of Copeland from Wildcat by the decree of the Tribunal was followed by a week of comparative quiet.

No one seemed to know whither the young exile had gone, and nobody cared. He had been the evil genius of Tiger Trace, and Wildcat did not want a similar experience.

During the seven days just mentioned, some strange things had taken place, but there had been no eruption of any kind.

The man known now as Wild Val, but who in reality was the redoubtable Captain Gold-Dust in his new role, had come back to Wildcat for a permanent residence, and had already obtained a remarkable ascendancy over the men.

It was as if he had completely buried his old self in the new character he had assumed. No one seemed to penetrate the disguise, for all cottoned to him, and in a few days he was really at the head of affairs there.

It happened at this juncture that the head of the Tribunal resigned, and Wild Val was chosen to succeed him—an event which made the laudat-hermit smile in secret.

More than once he had seen the monument erected to his memory in Satan's Canyon, and had read the inscription thereon with a laugh.

A sudden storm had blotted out the words written on the cross by Copeland while watched by Cyrene, and now there remained nothing but the original inscription.

If Durac of Hurricane Ledge wondered what had become of Copeland, he kept his thoughts to himself, and did not go out of his way to ask who had informed against the young man. He made short trips into the mountains, but did not bring anything back, and when night came he took his place at the tables of Wildcat and lost his dust with a coolness that gained the admiration of those who won it.

But a storm was brewing.

There came one day into the camp a man whose horse showed signs of travel among the Volcanic Hills.

It was difficult to tell his real age, for his face was covered with the yellow dust of the trails, and he had a way of looking through his long eyebrows which kept those who tried to guess how old he was from hitting the mark.

It was not long before this man stood against one of the rough bars talking to a crowd of bronzed men who were listening to what he said with almost bated breath.

"I am a man-hunter, gentlemen," he said to his audience. "I make no bones about my mission. I am looking for a man—one who has been missing for some time, and who came this way as far as we know. His name was Nate Newsome, and he was a man of some wealth and prominence in Kansas. What did he do that I should be looking for him? Nothing very much. He was a man who some day would fall heir to a lot of property; but he took it into his head to go West, and all at once we missed him. He vanished between two days, this man did, and we haven't heard anything very definite of him since."

"Was he off in the upper story?" asked

Wild Val, who stood among the listeners at the bar.

"Undoubtedly he was," said the stranger. "Nate Newsome was crazy; that is, he took spells which sent him into the, to him, unexplored States. Any one who would harm him ought to be hung without judge or jury, and he will be if I discover that Nate was killed by some scoundrel for his money or otherwise."

"What did he look like?"

"He was about my size, had long hair, and was rather good-looking. He had a notion that some one always owed him a great sum of money and used to enter houses and take possession of tables or desks and draw up notes on every Tom-Dick-and-Harry. It was a queer madness, was Nate Newsome's; but as it never harmed any one we did not care to balk him in it, as it seemed to give his mind employment."

A brief silence fell over the crowd.

"This man was worth about a quarter of a million, and would have been worth twice as much if he had not been swindled out of it by some Kansas sharps."

"Do you think he struck Arizona?"

The questioner was Captain Gold-Dust.

"I think I've tracked him to the Eastern line," was the reply. "I hope to find him, but I confess now that I haven't much hope. Nate Newsome is dead—murdered by some scoundrel who thought he had something worth killing him for."

"You've heard of the headless man of Tiger Trace?"

The stranger started.

"No. Was there such a person?" he asked.

"Yes. It happened just before the Ravens came down and blotted the camp out of existence."

The new-comer looked round upon the crowd. "Who knows anything about this?" he inquired eagerly.

"That's a man from Tiger," said some one, and Full-Deck Frank saw himself pointed out.

The following moment he stood face to face with the man who had just come, and Morgan—so the new-comer called himself—had taken his arm.

"What about this headless man?" he asked.

"Come outside. We don't need to talk here."

"To my shanty?"

"Yes, yes!"

Five minutes later Full-Deck Frank and Morgan stand in the former's shanty and the young man from Tiger Trace was telling all he knew about the tragedy of the severed head.

Morgan, the man-hunter, listened with bated breath and did not interrupt Full-Deck Frank until the whole narrative had been spun.

"I guess it wasn't Nate after all," said Morgan. "If the man who lost his head was Morel, a detective, he couldn't have been the man I am looking for."

"That is true. There is no doubt that the man who was secretly killed in Tiger Trace was a bloodhound."

Morgan was silent.

"I reckon I'll have to go back," he said after a brief reflection. "The madman has escaped me altogether. Now, the others will live fat on the money and some will get nothing at all. What do you do with murderers in this country?"

"We have certain laws that hang them."

"Courts, eh?"

"Vigilante courts."

"Got one here?"

"We have."

"Who runs it?—I mean who is the captain of the Vigilantes?"

"Wild Val."

"Could I see him?"

"Certainly. He heard the story you told in the bar-room and—"

"Where is this Wild Val?" broke in Morgan with some excitement in his eye.

Within the next ten minutes Captain Gold-Dust was listening to Morgan the man-hunter with no others around.

"I believe Nate Newsome to be dead. It is possible that he was followed by some one who wanted him out of the way because of the wealth he owned. Now, if I should find out who did this dastardly crime would you be willing to try him?"

"Bring him to Wildcat and he will be made to face the court I sit over," was the prompt reply.

"I'll try," answered Morgan, rising. "I am going away to-day. I intend to hunt down the murderer of Nate Newsome, and when I bring him back with me your court shall have a chance at him."

Captain Gold-Dust and a few others saw Morgan ride out of Wildcat, with the western sun shining on his well-grimed face.

For some time the man twice dead stood and watched the vanishing figure, and when it had disappeared he turned and slowly walked back.

Morgan pursued his way, turning certain bends in the rough trails, but keeping in a certain direction, as if riding toward a certain point.

Night came dark and lowering over the landscape around the ruins of Tiger Trace.

A few stars threw their light upon the spot,

and the winds whistled dolefully through the pines that stood here and there on the desolated scene.

A man entered the burnt camp and crossed the Plaza, to the cemetery on the hillside near by.

There he dismounted, and wandered among the mounds to be seen in the dim light.

At last he lighted a match and moved it over the ground, looking as it seemed for the freshest grave.

At last he stooped over one and examined the ground.

"They planted him in one corner of the graveyard—so they told me in Wildcat," he said in audible tones. "This must be the spot. I am going to see, at any rate."

The match went out, and the man-hunter did not strike another.

With a spade, which he had picked up among the ruins of the camp, he fell to work on the grave, and in a little while stood knee-deep in the earth.

The horse stood near by, and now and then stopped cropping the low grass long enough to see what his master was at.

Morgan suddenly threw up the spade and leaned down in the opening he had made.

The next moment he had seized something, which he drew up. He shut his teeth hard when he held it at arm's length, and looked at the hideousness of what he had taken from the opened grave.

It bore some traces of a human head, but it was no longer a spectacle to be looked at without courage.

"It was cut off, sure enough," said Morgan, setting the head upon the ground at the edge of the grave. "It came up without a bit of trouble. I don't care to see the body."

He drew another match across a stone, and held the rising light close to the horrid find.

All at once he fell back, a stare of horror in his eyes and a cry of strange triumph on his tongue.

"Just as I thought!" said he. "As I live, I have found Nate Newsome! This head belonged to him in life, but how can they say that the man who lost his skull in Tiger Trace was a detective named Morel? That's what puzzles me."

For some time the man in the grave continued to gaze at the head on the ground.

"I don't go back now until I have got at the very bottom of this crime. How did Nate come to call himself Morel, a detective, and why was he killed in this brutal manner? Morel, eh? There may be a man of that name, but as sure as I live this head never belonged to him. I would know the skull if it had lain in the grave a year."

He replaced the head in the grave and proceeded to refill it.

When he had finished he went back to his steed and threw the spade away.

If he had looked at that moment over his right shoulder he might have caught sight of a human figure among the shadows of the stunted pines—a figure he would have recognized if the light had been stronger; but without looking, Morgan, the man-hunter, turned his back on the mysterious grave and moved away.

"So you think you've found your man, eh?" said the person in the shadows. "Morgan, the man-hunter, you may be right."

And back toward Wildcat, over the mountain trails, stole a figure that looked like that of Wild Val, the Judge of the Tribunal.

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE POISE OF THE NOOSE.

DURAC of Hurricane Ledge stood alone on a narrow trail which ran through a cut in the hills near Wildcat City.

The cool man who had defended Tiger Trace at the risk of his life when its rough denizens were falling around him, had slipped from the new abode and reached this spot.

The rocks that rose above him were bare of verdure; they were the volcanic stones of that wonderful region which was honeycombed with caverns in some of which a regiment of soldiers could hide.

Durac had been creeping down this particular trail, stopping every now and then to listen or to look as far ahead as the stars would let him, for night was over the landscape, and he could not see very far.

Presently Durac reached a bend in the trail which led him to the left, and a few minutes later he stooped and crept into an opening like the mouth of a cave.

"Who comes?" asked a voice in the dense darkness.

The Man from Hurricane stopped and gave a low whistle, then went forward again.

"I have been waiting for you and had almost given you up," said the person whom Durac joined. "Let us go back where we can have a light."

In a little while the two gained a place where a match was struck and the flame applied to a tin lamp which illuminated a small chamber.

Durac stood face to face with Cyrene, the beauty of the mountains.

"You got my letter, rather mysteriously delivered, did you?" smiled the girl.

"I got it."
 "Well, how do you like your new home?"
 "I'm satisfied anywhere," was the reply.
 "Men of your stamp always are. You are now from Hurricane Ledge?"
 "Yes."
 "It is a good place to be from. It is a wolf's den; but you know this, I suppose?"
 Durac nodded.
 "You want to know why I have sent for you. You are in danger."
 "I always am."
 "But this time it is a danger as bad as the worst. You are a marked man."
 "Not for the first time."
 "Perhaps not."

Cyrene looked into Durac's face and seemed to make a study of it in the poor light of the lamp.

"You wonder who I am and why I should shut myself off from civilization and dwell in these caves and mountains," she went on.

"I have thought of that. I could not help it."

"I don't blame you. Durac of Hurricane, you never encountered me before you came to Arizona. I am not the person you may have thought me. I am not the lost child of Holden, the murdered millionaire."

Durac seemed to start.

"There!" said Cyrene with a light laugh, "don't betray yourself. The secret is safe in my bosom. No, I am not that child. She has another face and other fortunes. I am the outcast of the Volcanic Hills and my future is in no way connected with hers. Do I resemble her, now that you have a good opportunity to see me? Take the lamp and look me over. See if I look like the description they gave you of Lora Holden, as she ought to look if alive—if alive, I say."

She picked up the lamp and handed it to the Man from Hurricane Ledge.

Durac held the light in such a position as to show him the splendid figure of the woman who posed before him; but in a moment he replaced the light on the floor and said:

"No, you are not Lora Holden; I am convinced of that. You are a mystery though."

She smiled, but said nothing.

"You left your mark on the face of Captain Gold-Dust," continued Durac. "If you had waited a little while you would not have had the pleasure of doing it."

"Pleasure? How did you know it was a pleasure?"

"I could see that much by your eyes."

"Ah?"

"I saw the blood leap from his face as the whip came down. It marked him for life, but it was a suddenly ended one."

"Then, you have seen the cross in the canyon?"

"I have seen it."

"Here lies Captain Gold-Dust!"

Cyrene laughed at the end of her sentence and waited for Durac, who was looking at her with a singular eagerness, to speak again.

"I don't ask what is your mission into this region," said she. "That is a secret of your own. Durac of Hurricane Ledge, you are to meet the Death Tribunal of Wildcat and that before many hours have passed."

"Am I to follow Copeland?"

"Into banishment? Yes, the banishment of eternal darkness!"

"By whom am I to be accused and of what?"

"Are you cool enough to wait and see?" was the answer. "You look like a cool head, Durac; they say you faced the Ravens at Tiger Trace and poured the contents of Winchester and revolver into their faces. Were you sent into this region to defend a lot of human tigers who deserved all they received at the hands of Owllet and his red vultures? Is this your mission?"

"Woman, I believe you know it is not," said Durac.

The next moment Cyrene arose and went back into the cavern where she was lost to sight for a few minutes. When she came back she held something in her hand.

"As I have said, you are to be tried by the Death Court of Wildcat. You are to be forced to meet a packed court and a corrupted jury."

"But the crime?"

"That will be arranged."

"When?"

"Within the next twenty-four hours."

Durac saw Cyrene open the package in her grasp and it proved to be some papers which seemed very old, for they were torn, and ready in some places to fall to pieces.

"These are for you to read," said the girl, placing them in his hands. "I will retire until you have read them. My lamp is at your service. Durac of Hurricane, when you have read these documents you will know why I have intrusted them to you. Good-night."

He had looked at the papers while she was speaking, and when she had finished he looked up, but Cyrene was gone. He was the only occupant of the cavern and the lamp threw his shadow on the wall.

When he had assured himself that Cyrene had really disappeared, Durac fell to looking at the old package, which he opened more fully and

found to be a strange story of lost mines. There were rude diagrams, maps of mountain trails, and odd-looking charts of unknown regions—in fact, enough to puzzle the keenest.

In a little while Durac was absorbed in the work before him.

Page after page he looked over to lay aside; but more than once he shook his head, for the task was herculean.

Suddenly, however, he sprang up with a cry.

"My God! this is the strangest mystery of all. This is prophecy!" he exclaimed.

He jerked the lamp from the ground and held it so that the light fell upon the manuscript before him.

"This is the trail to the Lost Presidio! There can be no doubt of it. I hold in my hand the key to unbounded riches. I will keep it. I will carry with me from this cave this page of the story of the buried mines of Arizona."

He separated the page from its companions and, folding it, thrust it into his bosom, buttoning his coat over it to prevent a quick hand from depriving him of the prize.

"Close study, with the page for my guide, will reveal the mine to me," he went on. "I will take it up when I have leisure. I have been on two trails at once before this," and Durac of Hurricane Ledge extinguished the light and left the cavern.

If he expected to find Cyrene waiting for him at the mouth of the place he was disappointed.

The strange beauty of the Volcanic Hills was gone, and Durac went down the trail and was lost to view.

Half an hour later he entered Wildcat and saw the open doors of its gilded dens.

All at once there came out of one of them a tall figure which at once caught the sport's eye.

Wild Val was a man to be noticed wherever he was seen, and Durac could not help looking at his dashing figure in the door of the den.

The gaze of Wild Val wandered to Durac and rested there.

The next moment he stepped out of the place and walked toward the Plaza.

"Durac of Hurricane Ledge?" he said as he stopped on the fringe of the Square.

The Man from Hurricane started forward and walked straight toward him.

Wild Val stood like a statue in the light thrown from the dens on the Plaza.

"I am here!" said Durac, halting in front of the stalwart Captain of the Vigilantes.

"I want to warn you. You are in danger here. Safety lies beyond the boundaries of Wildcat. For you to remain here is death."

Durac thought of Cyrene's warning; but to hear it echoed by this man was a surprise. Why should Wild Val warn him?

"You don't believe me?" said the tall man, looking into Durac's eyes. "You prefer to stay here and die."

"I am not to be driven out as Copeland was without a chance to defend himself," he answered.

"You prefer to fight, eh?"

"I did not say so."

"You don't know the toils into which you have walked. Wildcat is about to 'post' you."

"For what?"

A grim smile seemed to come to Wild Val's face.

"For what, eh? You ask me for what, do you?"

"I do."

"For murder?"

It came into Durac's mind to laugh at the charge, but he saw in Wild Val's eyes a gleam that kept back all signs of merriment.

"As I live, I tell you what I have discovered," said he, looking at the Man from Hurricane Ledge. "I have warned you, Durac. You cannot say when the trap is sprung and the game in it that you were kept in ignorance of your doom."

The speaker turned away, but the hand of Durac caught him and stopped him on the Plaza.

"I am to be tried for murder, am I? I am to be stood face to face with the Death Tribunal of Wildcat, at the head of which stands no one but yourself. Captain Val, you are the coward. You dare not tell me who has accused me, nor point him out to Durac of Hurricane Ledge."

Captain Val broke from the hand that held him and recoiled a step.

"That is a lie!" he cried. "I dare tell you what you demand. I am the accuser. I accuse you of the murder of Nate Newsome, the madman, and the Death Tribunal of Wildcat will see that the guilty does not escape!"

CHAPTER XIX.

"POSTED."

THE accusation drew a scornful laugh from Durac's lips.

The words of it still rung out on the air when Wild Val turned and walked off, leaving the man he had accused looking coolly after him.

"He's playing a cool hand," said Durac half under his breath. "It is a very cool hand, but what other could he play under the circumstances?"

By this time Wild Val was out of sight and

the Man from Hurricane went back to his own shanty.

Entering he found lying on the rough table and half-open, a bit of paper which he picked up.

Across it ran a line of heavy writing and as he leaned toward the faint light outside, he read as follows:

"You will have at least one friend in this camp when the storm breaks. He will show his hand in time."

This was all. There was no signature to the scrawled note and Durac smiled when he looked up.

Captain Gold-Dust, the hermit-outlaw, was not the man not to follow up the play he had made. He had turned across the Plaza to his own nest to be met at the door by Full-Deck Frank.

"Well, I did the work, and he laughed in my face. I think I see a new face in the one I have just looked into. You are right, boy. We must strike."

"I am ready; but there must be no mistake."

"There will be none."

Wild Val looked at his weapons and turned back again.

"Captain?"

The leader of the Vigilantes stopped and waited for the speaker to come up.

A frown darkened his face when he saw who it was.

"What is it, Magog?"

"That name again! Have you got to using it since you came among us? I had hoped that it would never fall from your lips. It brings back unpleasant memories."

Wild Val smiled. The man before him was small and deformed. His face had been twisted out of shape by fire, and one of his hands was drawn up into hideous shape by the action of the same element.

The head of the Death Tribunal did not apologize.

"I want to ask you a question?"

"Well, you must hurry up, Magog, for I haven't much time on my hands and—"

"Guess I won't if you persist in hurling at me that hated nickname," and the speaker was turning away when Wild Val seized him and drew him forward.

"You must go on, now that you are getting stubborn. What was the question?"

"Then, you shall have it and I want a square answer. Do you believe that Captain Gold-Dust is dead?"

A look between a glare and a smile appeared in the depths of the listener's eyes.

"Why such an outlandish question?"

"I heard how they found him hanging in Satan's Canyon and so I went down there to look around a little. Sure enough there is a cross erected to his memory, but I don't more than half-believe there's anybody under it."

"You don't, eh? Why not?"

"Because the ground's been disturbed lately. Body-snatchers, eh, Captain Val?"

Wild Val looked down into the cripple's face and did not speak.

"When were you down there?"

"I just got back."

"And you think some one has dug up Captain Gold-Dust?"

"I do."

"Wolves?"

"Yes," grinned Magog. "wolves with hands!"

"What if they have, Magog? What is it to us what becomes of the bones of Captain Gold-Dust?"

"It's something to me. You see this face of mine and my hands? Well, once I had a hut in the mountains. It wasn't a palace, to be sure, but it was home. I was as happy there as a king surrounded by his court. I had for companions the birds of the hills and the sun lizard of the volcanic cliffs. One night I found my hut in flames and when I crawled out I was caught up by a man and thrown back into the fire. That is how I became so hideous and why they nicknamed me Magog."

"I never heard you speak of this before."

"I don't mention it very often. The man who came down upon my shanty that night was the villain for whom they put up a cross in the canyon—Captain Gold-Dust."

Wild Val was gazing at the cripple with more eagerness than ever, as though the brief narrative had been in the nature of a revelation.

"You didn't expect me to love that man, did you, Captain Val?" said Magog, looking up into the face above him. "I was only hiding my time. I have seen him many times since, but he seemed to have forgotten me, or not to have recognized me because of the figure the fire left. Do you know why he threw me back into the flames?"

There was no reply.

"Maybe you don't care about this tale of fire and wickedness," smiled Magog. "It's not much to you, Captain Val, but it's everything to me. I wanted this monster to live. I wanted to haffle him some day and to pay him back for that devilish deed, for ever since I have felt the fire in my flesh and along my bones. I intend to roast this fiend alive!"

"But he's dead."

"And the grave has been robbed, ha! ha!"

Magog, gnashing his teeth, fell back and Wild Val passed on, a smile on his lips while he listened to the echo of the cripple's laugh.

"Captain Val, I say: just a moment."

"Not one! I have other business on hand."

"You shall hear me!"

Magog was all rage now and the next moment his little misshapen figure came over the ground in a half stagger.

"I'm going to roast him yet, I say!" he shouted, shaking his fists in the air. "I shall find the stealer of Captain Gold-Dust's bones and take them from him. I intend to burn them all and throw the ashes of the man who deformed me to the winds. Do you hear me, Captain Val?"

There was no answer to these words and Captain Gold-Dust passed on until he entered a certain cabin and opened a door in the floor.

In a moment he was descending a ladder which seemed to lead into the very bowels of the earth, and when he touched ground again he ran down a narrow corridor and was welcomed by a dozen rough-looking men whose figures were revealed by torches placed in the earthen walls of the chamber.

This was the secret court of the dread Death Tribunal of Wildcat—a tribunal as merciless as the famous Council of Ten. Its sway was wide and as deadly as wide. For a man to be "posted" by this Tribunal was to be convicted and the sentence was never reversed.

The lightest sentence was banishment, such as Copeland had received; the heaviest and most common one, death.

Men who came to Wildcat to play and who were detected in cheating felt the power of the Death Tribunal. "They were 'posted'—that is, the accusation was generally posted on a post erected for that single purpose on the Plaza. The victim was next arrested and sometimes given a public trial, but oftener tried in secret session and executed in secret.

The Death Tribunal was as terrible an order as the Vigilante Court of Hangtown.

Captain Gold-Dust advanced to one end of the chamber and faced the men in waiting for him.

"We have with us a man as dangerous as a rattler," he said. "When I tell you that he belongs to a class not permitted to live among us, that he is a man-tracker, you will know that this is a case for immediate action. The Man from Hurricane Ledge is not only a man-hunter, but a murderer as well. I accuse him of murder now. You or some of you have heard the story of Nate Newsome, the lost lunatic from Kansas."

"We have heard it."

"The Man from Hurricane could solve the mystery that surrounds Newsome's fate if he would. He knows where lie the bones of the poor demented devil."

"That seemed enough."

"The Tribunal will vote for death!" cried half a dozen voices.

"Post him at once!"

A vote was speedily taken and Durac was sentenced to be posted in regular form.

A man came forward and took a seat at the little table in the center of the chamber.

The others discussed the situation while this man drew up the accusation.

"How long a time shall he have between the posting and the arrest?" some one asked.

"Let it be the briefest. The charge won't strike him as anything sudden. Give him half an hour."

The man who spoke was Full-Deck Frank, who knew that Captain Gold-Dust had met Durac.

The charge was finished and handed to one of the number.

Ten minutes later a man crossed the Plaza and pinned to the post with a bowie the accusation.

In another minute, as it seemed, the various dens of Wildcat knew that a paper fluttered from the death-post on the Square, and men sprung from the tables and ran to it.

Who had been posted now? Which one of them was to be brought before the Death Tribunal?

Among those who saw the paper was Magog. The cripple of the camp managed to get close enough to hear it read by Dictionary Nat, and when the last word had been spoken, he turned and ran off.

"It's you, this time, captain," he said to the man whom he found standing in the door of the shanty tenanted by Durac of Hurricane Ledge. "They've posted you in regular order. They won't come for ten minutes yet, anyhow. There's a chance left. I saw you in the pass last night—I was doing some prowling on my own hook—and you seem to know the country well enough to give 'em the slip."

Durac's face seemed to grow suddenly stern.

He gazed over Magog's shoulders toward the Plaza, where he could hear voices of men; but all of a sudden he looked down into the cripple's face.

"Is the Tribunal sustained by all in Wildcat?" he asked.

"No; I don't sustain the infamous order," was the quick reply. "I don't like it because it

never shows mercy nor gives a man a single chance for his life."

"Are you the only person who does not sustain it?"

"The sole and only one, captain."

Once more Durac looked toward the Plaza.

"When do you think they will come for me?"

"Captain, by heavens! they're coming now!"

The Man from Hurricane Ledge seemed to draw back, but the next instant he stood full in the doorway, and Magog, looking at his hands, saw a six-shooter in each one.

"I like your grit, therefore, it's two ag'in' fifty," said the cripple, and he placed himself at Durac's side.

CHAPTER XX.

IN WILD VAL'S TRAP.

DURAC looked down at the cripple and said "Go back while there is yet time. I will fight my own battles. I know these men, and will meet them with grit enough for the whole crowd."

But Magog only crept closer to Durac, and drew from beneath his jacket a revolver, which was small, but deadly looking.

"I claim a place where I am, Durac. I like a brave man. You are in the toils, and there's a conspiracy against you."

There was no chance now for further remonstrance on Durac's part, for the men known to be the Vigilantes of Wildcat had reached a spot where they could be plainly seen.

On they came until they were within a few feet of the door, when they halted, and the foremost spoke:

"We have business with the Man from Hurricane Ledge."

"I am here," replied Durac.

"You have been posted, and we are ordered to arrest you."

The tall figure in the doorway did not move.

"Did you hear me, Durac?"

"I heard."

"We have an order for your arrest, I say."

"Issued by what authority?"

"By the authority of the Tribunal."

At this moment Magog glanced up into Durac's face, and thought he saw a smile of derision there.

"I wonder if he is going to submit, or use the six-shooters in his hands?" passed through the cripple's mind.

"What if I should not recognize such authority?"

"It's the highest in Wildcat, captain."

"So I am told. But it arrests at the caprice of its head, and condemns without mercy."

The men backing up the leader of the arresting-party looked at one another, but did not speak.

"Then, you don't submit to the order?" said the leader at last.

"I have not said so."

At the same time Durac stepped from the door.

"This work of the Tribunal is not news to me," he said. "I had been posted, and were looking for you. You may go back to the man whose slaves you are, and say that Durac of Hurricane Ledge acknowledges no such authority as he pretends to hold over the life and liberty of a fellow-human."

"We can tell him that; but, remember that he has the men of Wildcat at his back."

"I see that."

A brief silence followed the last reply, and the men who faced Durac began to look uneasy.

"Do you mean defiance?" asked the leader of the band.

"I mean justice."

The man, over whose face came a dark scowl, turned to those behind him.

"Back!" Durac and Magog heard him say. "This fool resists—the first case of the kind we've had for a whole year," and the ten big toughs wheeled and marched back.

"That's only a breathing spell," said Magog.

"They will report and come back in a short time. No man has ever successfully resisted the Death Tribunal. I've seen it tried more than once, and it failed every time. The way is yet open, though they will watch you. Once in the mountains, they can't find you."

"But why go, Magog?" said Durac, stooping and laying his hand on the cripple's shoulder.

"For your life's sake, Durac."

Without another word, Durac drew the little man into the shanty and showed him the letter recently found on his table.

"It seems that I have a friend here," he said.

"Do you know this scrawl, Magog?"

Magog's eyes seemed to light up with sudden fire when he caught sight of the document, and Durac saw him read it in the light of the lamp.

"It's rather queer. I have a letter in the same hand."

"You have?" cried the Man from Hurricane Ledge.

"Yes."

The good hand of the cripple was thrust into his bosom, and he pulled out a bit of soiled and crumpled paper, which he extended to Durac.

The sentenced man took it and looked at it for a moment.

"Was this left in your shanty, Magog?"

"It was nailed to my door."

"When?"

"Six months ago."

"Were you in trouble then?"

"Yes, Wildcat and I were getting on bad terms. I thought I had a fight on my hands, but the whole thing blew over; but I kept this note in hopes that some day I would run across the writer."

"But you never have?"

"It is as much a mystery to-day as it was when I first saw it on my door."

"It is very strange, and yet you tell me that you are the only person in Wildcat who don't approve of the work of the Death Tribunal."

"That is right. I am the only one."

Durac folded the paper and handed it back to Magog.

"For a time I thought I was on to the writer," said the little man. "I thought it was Wildcat."

"But you discovered afterward that you were mistaken?"

"I did."

"Well, one friend among fifty friends won't do one much good," grinned Durac. "I want no one to take any risks for me. I will fight out my own campaign."

At this moment there was heard another sound of feet and the two friends went to the door.

"They're back," said Magog. "I told you it was only a breathing spell."

There had halted outside the shanty more than ten men, and the Man from Hurricane Ledge could see that they were the tallest and most giant-like of all in the camp.

The revolvers which he had placed on the table while talking to Magog were picked up again and their owner stood once more in the doorway.

"We have reported that you defy the city," said the leader of the band. "We are here to say that you are charged by the Tribunal with having violated one of the laws of God and that we, as the agents of his vengeance, are to take you to the proper court for trial."

Durac made no reply, but it seemed to keen-eyed Magog who was watching him that his lips met and that he leaned toward the crowd which faced him.

Suddenly Durac put up the six-shooters and stepped toward the men of Wildcat.

"Where is your court and its judge?" he said.

"Show me the man who accuses me."

All this was so sudden that the crowd seemed to recoil and Magog cried:

"He's changed his mind! He is going to face the Death Tribunal. That ends the career of Durac of Hurricane Ledge!"

In a moment the accused was in the midst of the men sent to effect his arrest.

Magog stood undecided for a moment, but suddenly sprung across the space and placed himself at Durac's side.

"Take me, too!" he said addressing the men of Wildcat.

"But we don't want you, Magog."

"You must take me whether you want to or not. I am standing by Durac of Hurricane. I approve of all he has done. If he has killed a man I sustain him. I am with the man you have in your grip. Hurrah for Durac!"

Magog was pushed back so violently that he fell and did not rise until the crowd had turned back with their victim.

"By heavens! you shall take me," he cried, staggering after the lot. "I say Durac is innocent of the crime." And he managed to reach Durac's side despite the numerous set-backs he received, and remained there during the march back.

Durac was conducted, not to the main den of the place, where the public trials sometimes allowed by the Tribunal took place, but to a shanty beyond whose door he was taken.

A concealed door in the floor was uncovered and the Man from Hurricane went down a ladder preceded by two men and followed by the others.

"Bring the prisoner forward!" said a voice underground, and Durac felt a hand at his arm, and he was escorted down what he knew was a narrow corridor into a chamber of spacious dimensions.

In a moment a door in one of the walls was burst open, and revealed by the glare of torches, a lot of men wearing masks filed into the place.

The Man from Hurricane Ledge fell back a step and then looked calmly at the spectacle.

"The prisoner is here!"

The masks arranged themselves around Durac, and he saw that all were undoubtedly citizens of Wildcat, for their garments told him as much; but the man at the head of the ring—a man whose figure seemed familiar—attracted him the most.

"Read the charge," said this personage.

Instantly a roll of paper came from the bosom of one of the members of the Death Tribunal, and the person who held it read, in a clear tone, the terrible accusation.

The document recited that Nate Newsome had left Kansas, that he was mad at the time, and that he had been followed for a purpose by an enemy.

out of the trap, but, as I have said, not one suspects that I am that wanted captive. I can go back to Wildcat, but you must not re-enter it until I speak. Do you accept the conditions?"

Durac held out his hand.

"I do."

Five minutes later the Man from Hurricane Ledge found himself in the mountains looking down upon the clustered lights of the town and trying to picture to himself the consternation which must follow the discovery of his miraculous escape.

"Strange that I should meet here the man sent out by my employer months ago," he said. "He wrote the words on the wall of the dungeon when he had no hope. I wonder if Wild Val ever saw them?"

Suddenly there was to be seen a general shifting of the lights he had been regarding, and, not able to guess the cause of it, Durac turned and left the scene.

Let us leave him in the mountains and descend to the town below.

"He's safe till to-morrow, anyway," said a handsome man, who addressed several men with whom he had left the cabin whose concealed door in the floor led one to the secret halls of the mountain league of death. "We want the traitor first. That voice must be located and the owner of it perish at the hands of the Tribunal. Durac is safe in the dungeon."

The men exchanged looks, but said nothing aloud.

In a little while Captain Gold-Dust, *alias* Wild Val, stood in his own shanty and was listening to Full-Deck Frank.

The young man was somewhat excited and the Judge of the dread Tribunal was giving him close attention.

"I certainly saw those same horse-tracks in the mountain awhile ago," said the youth. "There is said to be none just like them in all this country. They were seen near Tiger Trace several days before its destruction. The red villain who hates everything white but the strange creature called Will Winnie rides a steed with such hoofs. No one else rides a horse similarly marked."

"Then, you conclude that the Raven is about again?"

"It tells me so. What has become of the girl?"

"Which one?"

"The wild one."

Wild Val shook his head.

"I haven't heard her sing for some time. One can generally track her by her songs, which have more melody in them than all the birds in this region."

"I thought you meant the other girl—the beauty of the whip," said Captain Gold-Dust, with a sinister smile. "I want to see her, but not in my old garb, of course."

The speaker folded his arms and looked at Full-Deck Frank as if on the eve of saying something important.

"Do you think Durac recognized me?" he suddenly asked.

"If he is the man you say he is, he certainly did."

"I am not mistaken. I did not recognize him at first, but the longer I watched him—the more I tracked him to the hills—the more I studied him, the more convinced I became that he was a dangerous man for us to confront in this country. Frank, my boy, we are going to the secret soon."

"To the Lost Presidio?" cried the youth.

"Not so loud. These men, if they suspected me, would have the same suspicions that the toughs of Tiger Trace had. I have few secrets which you do not know, as a whole or in part."

"You have told me that we should some day be the big nabobs of the Southwest, and I see no other way of becoming such than by finding something like the Lost Presidio."

Wild Val smiled.

"A little patience—a little more clearing of the way," he said. "We can't afford to have trail-dogs like Durac hanging around. To-morrow, whether we find the traitor or not, we doom this man and force him to tread the death corridors under ground. The time will come when there can be a resurrection of my old self—when all men shall know that the inscription on the cross in Satan's Canyon is a lie; but not yet, Frank, my boy—not just yet."

What would Wild Val have said if he could have seen the little misshapen figure with two glowing eyes crouched on the outside of the shanty, eagerly drinking in every word? What would he have done if he could have heard the muttered maledictions that fell from this figure's lips while he played his part, at last hobbling off with the same eyes dancing a devil's dance in his head, and the scars of his face as red as the flames that had put them there?

"What do you intend to do when you run across the beauty of the whip?" asked Full-Deck Frank. "You swore at the time to get even with her?"

"I haven't forgotten," was the reply. "I don't forget such things. I intend to pay her back. What a fair demon she is, boy."

There was no reply.

"You aren't in love with her yourself, are you?"

The youth started, and a deep flush overspread his face.

"There! I didn't intend to tread so close to your secret," laughed Wild Val. "I'm afraid, though, that she would give you trouble—that you could not master her. The whip might be her dowry, and if she should bring it down across your cheek, why, you would not have the coolness to laugh in her face."

Full-Deck Frank did not seem to hear the last words of the man whose secrets he was keeping.

His face was white and his eyes had a mad glare.

"I want to settle with her," continued Wild Val. "Besides, you wouldn't want a wife whose name is unknown. What she is is a mystery. No one seems to know anything about the ancestry of Cyrene. You want to go back to civilization some day, but you would not want to take her along. As for me—I need not care, for I am buried here."

Full-Deck Frank sprang up, and, like a person unable to curb his emotion, ran to the door, which he jerked open, and before Wild Val could restrain him, had left him alone.

The diminutive figure at the side of the cabin hugged the ground, and was not discovered by the young man in his passionate flight.

"I touched a tender spot," smiled Wild Val. "He is in love with the beauty of the whip and I trenched on his preserves. You must curb that passion, boy. You shall not defeat my plans. I am more powerful here than you suspect and the secrets you possess—if you give one of them away—you will wish you had never seen the golden light of day."

Full-Deck Frank ran from Wildcat and did not stop for breath until he found himself among the trails of the hills.

"I have served him. I know who he is and one word from me would dash to earth his plans and land him in the hands of his foes. He wed Cyrene? He shall not! I have loved—ay, worshiped her—from the first time I saw her and it was for her that I played my hands against Copeland, the Jonah of Tiger Trace. Now, am I to be beaten out of the beautiful prize by the man down yonder?" Full-Deck Frank had stopped on a point of the elevated trail from which he could look down upon the camp he had just left.

"It fires every drop of my blood when I think of it," he went on. "Who is that man, anyhow? Why has he hidden among the mountains all these years? Why does he play dead, and laugh when he reads his own epitaph on the cross in the canyon?"

The young man turned away and went down the trail.

"If I could run across her to-night I would play my best card and court his vengeance," he cried. "I would give all I possess to get her among these hills. What would I care for the Lost Presidio if I could call her mine?"

Half a minute later Full-Deck Frank fell back from the advancing tread of a horse, and sheltering his figure by a huge rock in the path, looked with his heart in his throat.

Presently there drew rein within ten feet of where he hid a woman who sat the steed she rode with the grace of a queen of the race-course.

Full-Deck Frank uttered a cry which he could not keep back.

At sound of his voice the occupant of the saddle turned and he stood erect and sprang forward.

"It is you, is it?" said Cyrene, leaning forward and recognizing him with a smile.

"It is I. I have been hoping that you would give me a chance to see you in the mountains. I have something to say."

"Something about the whipping I gave your master?" said the beauty coldly.

"He is not my master. I have disowned him," cried Full-Deck Frank. "I never did like him and now I need not serve him any longer."

"Because there's a cross over him. Is that it?"

Full-Deck Frank did not know how to reply for a minute.

"Graves have strange tenants sometimes," continued Cyrene, the old smile reappearing at her mouth.

The young man for a moment stood like one thunderstruck in Cyrene's presence.

"Let us dismiss Captain Gold-Dust," he said. "I have something of importance to say to you."

"You may talk while we move along. I am going forward."

"Not I will talk while you sit where you are," and the hand of the impetuous speaker seized the bridle-rein. "I am no bandit. I never left my State for her good; no man-hunter ever followed me across the continent. Cyrene, my beautiful angel, my heart was yours the day I met you first. Without you the world will ever have for me a dark shadow. I serve no man. I am ready to go back to civilization—back to the home where I will be received with joy; but I would bear with me the most beautiful bride of the Southwest—the peerless mountain beauty, Cyrene, Queen of the Whip."

Full-Deck Frank saw the eyes above him

soften for an instant, but all at once they got another light, and the hand which he had put up was shaken loose.

"You have been that man's friend and slave! An atonement of a thousand years could not wipe out the stain of that friendship. Your wife? They call me an outcast—a mountain pariah; but I would not stoop so low as to become your bride!"

The young man recoiled from the look and voice of the beauty in the saddle.

"I would be the one that stooped," he hissed. "By heavens, Cyrene, it is your blood that is tainted, and your soul!"

The sentence was never finished, for the hand of Cyrene went up, and came down with all her strength, and Full-Deck Frank fell back with a cry—marked for life!

CHAPTER XXIII.

THE SWINGING HEAD.

YES, marked for life.

There was something horrible in the thought as it surged through the young sport's mind.

He saw Cyrene disappear while the blood trickled down his face, and in a moment, as it seemed, the hoof-beats had ceased to echo on the trail.

"A thousand curses on her head!" he cried. "I hope she may fall into the captain's hands. No, no! I want to get even with her myself, and I will. I felt that infernal whip cutting its way to the bone. She would not stoop to marry me! That was what she said, wasn't it? I will live to make her repent of that insult."

He went down the mountain until he found a stream, where he washed the blood-stains from his face, and bandaged it as well as he could.

"Shall I go back?" he asked himself. "What could I say to the curious ones there? What to Wild Val in particular? Yet, where else can I go?"

He walked back toward Wildcat, cursing his bad luck at every step, and every now and then anathematizing the beauty to whom he owed his bleeding mark.

Full-Deck Frank made his way into Wildcat in the early hours of the morning, while it was yet only starlight, and when but few lights were visible.

"What, have you posted another one?" he exclaimed, as he reached the Plaza and saw something hanging to the post in the center of the Square.

"Great heavens, whose work is this?" he shrieked, falling back from the frightful apparition which, despite the uncertain light, showed up plain enough to drive all courage from his heart.

The next moment he was standing spellbound in front of the post.

The object swinging back and forth in the morning wind had the shape of a skull, and when Full-Deck Frank struck a light and held it close to his "find," he recoiled with a chattering of teeth.

It was a human head, sure enough!

"Whose is it?" he gasped. "As I live, I believe it has just been taken from a grave."

His match went out none too soon for him, and he looked toward the only den open at the hour.

"Let 'em find it out for themselves," said he. "I won't tell them that I have been whipped by showing them my face. There'll be a time in camp to-morrow when this head is found. It's queer that whoever hung it here did not leave anything with it." And he retired, with one more shuddering glance at the head.

Morning came, and the first denizens astir in Wildcat came out half-awake after their bout with the "tiger" of the gaming dens.

The barkeeper of the "Golden Trump" came across the Plaza and almost ran against the head, which just at that moment lurched to one side, and nearly hit him in the face.

When the liquor tough saw it he fell back with a piercing cry, and for a full minute stood on the spot like a person struck dumb by horror; then a series of yells welled from his throat until he saw men issuing from nearly every shanty, nearly all armed in expectation of an attack, of some kind.

Wild Val saw the head and shut his teeth hard.

He came forward and eyed it with great curiosity; but all at once he broke into a laugh.

"An almighty grim joke!" he said.

"It looks like Captain Gold-Dust's head," said some one. "I recognize the hair, for I helped to bury him in the canyon. But who would bring it down here to hang it on the post?"

That was the mystery.

No one seemed willing to take it down, and it was left to swing where it had been placed by some one while the citizens of Wildcat discussed the ghastly discovery over the counter of the Golden Trump.

"That's only one person in these parts mean enough to do that deed," said a big man who stood against the counter.

A dozen voices asked: Who is he?

"Owlet, the young chief of the Ravens," was the reply.

"Why should he play a grim joke like that on Wildcat?"

"Why shouldn't he? What's Tiger Trace to day? Wiped out! What are half a dozen other camps that used to exist among the Volcanic Hills? Destroyed! And they say that their doom was preceded by some singular act on the part of the red-skin. Tiger Trace had its tragedy just before he came. There was a severed head, and when he came he didn't have one leg upon another. That head out there is the red's work. It means a swoop of the Ravens. That's a Jonah in camp."

Captain Gold-Dust slipped from the saloon and made his way to his young friend's quarters.

In a little while he was leaning across the threshold, and the youthful sport, hiding his swollen face among the scanty bed-clothes, was looking at him with a sheepish eye.

"Why ain't you out and looking at the head that came to camp last night?" he cried, advancing upon Frank, but suddenly discovering the marked face he stopped and laughed.

"What did you find her too?" he cried. "Did she leave her autograph on your cheek? By Jove, boy, I believe it enhances your looks!"

"No insults!" roared Frank, leaping from the cot and standing in front of Captain Gold-Dust with his hands clinched and his eyes aflame. "Remember that I hold the secret of your life!"

"And you threaten to sell it, do you? She cut you to the bone whereas she only gave me a little gash or two—love-strokes, ha, ha!"

Full-Deck Frank felt his blood tingle while he flushed crimson.

"I am in no mood for joking. I saw the head when I came in."

"You did, eh? Why didn't you take it down and throw it away?"

"I didn't want to handle the accursed thing."

"Hands too white, ha? See here! You can't afford to show your teeth to me."

There was no reply.

"Tell me how you got the cut," went on the Captain, smiling in a manner that increased the young man's ire. "You must have insulted her. I don't doubt it."

"I said but a few words and she listened to them patiently."

"But they stung, eh?"

"She wanted to give some one the whip."

"Ho, ho! and as you were the first one she met she gave it to you. Is that it?"

"I suppose so."

"Wait till I net the beauty! I will avenge both of us."

"That will never be."

Captain Gold-Dust came closer and caught Frank's arm.

"I don't want you to interfere in any way," he said. "I won't have any rivals in this game."

"But you may have them whether they are desirable or not. What do they say the head means?"

"A swoop by the Ravens."

"When?"

"It is liable to come at any time. Did you recognize the head?"

"No, but I thought—"

Frank stopped and looked away.

"You thought what?"

"That it might be the one that was lost in Tiger Trace."

"Morel's?"

The young man nodded. He could not help noticing how strangely Wild Val spoke the name of the man who had lost his head in the shanty of the burnt camp.

"It may be Morel's head, but never mind whose it is. It has unsteadied every nerve in Wildcat and if Owllet hung it on the post he knew just what he was doing. Come; we are going down to the chamber of the Tribunal. There will be a court of two this morning."

"What do you mean?"

"Follow me and see."

Captain Gold-Dust left the shanty followed by the young sport who had slept in his clothes. Ten minutes afterward the pair stood in the underground chamber of the Death Tribunal.

"You remember the victim we left in the little dungeon?"

"Yes."

"Sentence was passed upon him and all that is wanting now is the execution of that decree. You are armed?"

Full-Deck Frank showed his revolvers and Captain Gold-Dust nodded.

The Judge of the Tribunal led the way to the door of the dungeon watched maliciously by the youth. The torch the man "twice dead" carried threw a ghostly light around upon the walls and their tread echoed loudly in the heart of the lover of Cyrene.

"Stand here," whispered Wild Val, stationing his companion at a certain spot. "I shall open the door. If he springs out like a tiger—he is not armed, you know—cover him with the six-shooter, and if he refuses to stop, touch the trigger."

Full-Deck Frank said nothing, but took his place and saw Captain Gold-Dust lay one hand on the door.

The following moment the portal was thrown open and the glare of the torch streamed into the place.

"Prisoner?" called the voice of the head of the Tribunal.

There was no answer.

Captain Gold-Dust cautioned Frank with a look to stand on his guard and then stepped into the cell.

In a second a wild exclamation fell from his tongue.

"The man is gone!"

A smile overspread Full-Deck Frank's face.

"And see what he has left on the wall of this dungeon!"

The young gambler sprang into the place and saw Captain Gold-Dust holding his torch close to a lot of characters scratched on the stone.

"He could not have written those words," said Frank. "Do they not say that the writer had been ten days in here when they were written there?"

"They do!" and then Wild Val seemed to hold his breath.

"Carl Clutch?" he cried. "There was such a man once. But when was he shut up; here and by whom?"

The other shook his head.

"What is the secret of escape from this dungeon, anyhow? Why, I would have bet my head that we had Durac safe here. Some one knew the secret of the concealed spring that unlocks the door. But when was Carl Clutch cooped up in this place?"

Captain Gold-Dust went back with a puzzled countenance. He passed from the underground court and up into the light of day.

The first man he met was duly collared.

"How long have you been here, Mica Mark?" he cried.

"Three years."

"And all the time a member of the Tribunal?"

"I was in at the beginning."

"Did any one cooped up in the dungeon ever get away, or was there ever in that place a man called Clutch?"

"Six months ago we lost a prisoner—lost 'im, Captain Val!"

"He was sentenced and escaped, eh?"

"Yes. Cold-Deck Dan knows the full story; ask him."

Cold-Deck Dan! That would be asking "Carl Clutch" himself.

CHAPTER XXIV.

ANOTHER MAN'S SECRET.

THE ghastly object swinging in the morning light on the post in the Square was taken down and buried by some one, but the incident did not allay the excitement.

It was believed that the head meant a swoop by the Ravens and this was discussed in every part of the camp.

In addition to the finding of the head the escape of Durac from the little dungeon of the Death Tribunal was known to the members of that stern court.

To all but one man the prisoner's escape was a profound mystery, and he was as much mystified as any, if one had judged him by his expressions.

Cold-Deck Dan did not hesitate to say that there must be a traitor in the league, but he could not point him out and Wild Val was perplexed.

It was thought for a time that Magog had obtained secret access to the underground corridors and had liberated the prisoner, but this was soon disproved and the cripple of Wildcat released from suspicion.

In anticipation of a swoop by the dread red guardians of the Lost Presidio, Wildcat prepared for defense and those who had any valuable property proceeded either to bury it or to wager it at the tables.

The fame of Owllet and his band as camp destroyers was almost world-wide. It was believed that the young Indian Attila had sworn to wipe out every camp in that particular region in order to render safe the secret he was guarding, and in consequence of this belief—strengthened, as it had been by the destruction of Tiger Trace—men had left the country seeking safety elsewhere, and none but the reckless had remained.

It was with feelings not easily described that the men of Wildcat saw the day draw to a close and the shadows of another night spread their pall over the landscape.

Everybody went armed and the coolest ones who went to the tables did so prepared and ready at any time to spring up and defend the camp.

Wild Val went down into the chambers of the underground court and straight to the little dungeon.

The leader of the Vigilantes of Wildcat was alone.

It was evident that the escape of Durac, coupled with the scrawl found on the wall, still puzzled him and when he had shut the door which excluded him from the main part of the court he ran his light along the stone.

There stood the letters Carl Clutch had cut into the stone. He read them again and then drew back.

"I wonder if he was on the trail when he did this?" he asked himself aloud. "And which he got out what did he do? Cold-Deck Dan tells me that the prisoner was a cool head who was charged with cheating at the tables and was condemned to die here by the Tribunal; but that somehow or other he got out. Was there a traitor in the ranks then as there is one now? Had this Carl Clutch a friend as Durac had, and is that friend the same person?"

Wild Val remained in the cavern for some time, and when he came out of the dungeon his eyes had a singular glitter.

Crouching near the cabin from which he emerged was a figure which wholly escaped his gaze.

"He has been down underground where the court of the Tribunal is," said this person, under his breath. "That is the man who wants the head of Durac of Hurricane Ledge, and if he knew how I hate him, he would not stop much to want mine as well."

The speaker was Magog, the deformed, and when he staggered off, his limbs refusing him the agile motions they once had, his little eyes fairly danced.

Wild Val went to Full-Deck Frank's cabin, but did not find the young man in.

"Captain Val?"

He stopped at mention of his new name, and saw a man advancing toward him.

"Well, Dagger Dock?"

"What makes Magog, the little piece of burnt humanity, eye you so much of late?" asked the man who had come up.

"Ha, does he do that?"

"Nearly all the time. I caught him at it this morning, and not an hour ago he was looking at you from behind a shanty with eyes that seemed to burn their way deeper into his head."

Wild Val laughed.

"Let him go. If I am worth looking at he may have his look out."

"But he may mean something. He may think that you are the person who threw him back into the fire, according to his story, which few of us believe. These little bits of blood and passion are dangerous, and, if you say so, I will curb Magog—I'll give him to understand that he can't play this spying game here in Wildcat. We can get along without him."

Captain Gold-Dust smiled once more and said that he was able to take care of spies, and was moving on again when the voice of the man checked him as before.

"What did they do with the head?" asked Dagger Dock.

"I don't know. The orders were that it should be buried, and I suppose it was taken to the hills and put away under a heap of yellow dirt."

"It is the queerest mystery we ever had in Wildcat, Captain Val," continued the tough. "I managed to get a good look at the head, all by myself. It wasn't Captain Gold-Dust's head at all, as some of the boys thought."

"Ah?"

"It belonged to a man named Liar Luke, a character whom I used to meet among the Ophir Hills ten years ago. How did I come to recognize it as his head? Once we got into a regular pitched battle with the Greaser gamblers who crossed the line, and among the other casualties Liar Luke had his skull laid open in a marvelous manner to live over it. It was the most peculiar wound you ever saw, and when I came to examine it I found the crease on the skull just as we left Luke's head when he got over his hurt."

Wild Val said nothing.

"Well, that isn't the end of the mystery," Dagger Dock went on. "To satisfy myself I went down to Satan's Canyon, where the boys put up a cross to Captain Gold-Dust, and for once in my life played grave-robber."

The face of Wild Val seemed to get a scowl.

"What did you find?"

"A body without a head."

"That is strange."

"Not very, I think, when you put this and that together."

"Don't you think the boys found Captain Gold-Dust swinging in the canyon?"

Dagger Dock did not speak for a moment.

"It don't look that way now," he said.

"What do you think?"

"A trick has been played. The head which was hung to the post came from that grave in the canyon. Tiger Trace had a head mystery just before it was wiped out of existence, and now we have one, too."

"But the dead man in the canyon had on Captain Gold-Dust's clothes—sash and all."

"Yes."

"Some of the boys recognized him in spite of the condition of the face."

"I know they did."

"But what worries you about him, Dagger Dock?"

In an instant the face of the man standing before Wild Val underwent a change.

"It is this: Captain Gold-Dust in life—and mind you I don't say he isn't dead though there is something mysterious about the head on the post—was a hunted man."

"A hunted man?"

"Yes. He came to this region from the East."

He could not break from certain manners that gave him away. I have lived in the East myself. I was born on the coast of Maine and this is my home by reason of circumstances. Captain Gold-Dust was from New York and a hunted man as well."

"What do you think he had done?"

"Oh, it was something important enough to drive him West—to make him hide in the mountains. He never found the Lost Presidio. I know some used to say that he knew where the so-called lost bonanza was, but that was all bosh. He was a nabob when he reached Arizona."

Wild Val looked interested.

"It's a fact, Captain Val," smiled Dagger Dock. "I shouldn't be surprised if this man brought a million with him. How do I know? It's a long story and I will tell all of it another time. I used to keep one of Captain Gold-Dust's secrets—one he thought no one knew but himself. I accidentally found his treasure-house. It was immense—all gold and jewels. What a haul I could have made, but I wasn't going to risk my head by taking a single ounce. The money was coined and you know that the wealth of the Lost Presidio isn't in that shape."

"Then, according to your story, Captain Gold-Dust was playing another role here in the Volcanic Hills?"

"That's exactly what he was doing."

"But he was sharp enough to conceal his identity even from those who should discover his wealth?"

"He thought so."

The next moment Wild Val seemed to gasp for breath.

"Did you discover his real name? Did you find out who he was and why he fled from the East, as you said he did?"

"I'll see you some other time, Captain Val. But let me say there is another chapter to this story which I have never told a living soul since my discoveries in the mountains. I guess I know more about Captain Gold-Dust than any living man in these parts. He was a nabob; he was hunted for a crime as dark as the crimes of the demons of hades, and it was well for him that I kept the secret, for if Wildcat had heard of it there would have been a sitting of the Death Tribunal."

Dagger Dock walked away watched in a strange manner by Wild Val. "So you know it, eh?" he grated. "So you found the treasure house in the hills and searched it for the secret? Dagger Dock, it would have been better for your future if you had never struck that trail!"

Captain Gold-Dust continued to eye the man until he was no longer to be seen when he turned back and went to his own shanty.

"Yes, hunted and twice dead; but worth a dozen dead men yet!" he said.

There came to his window and looked in upon him by drawing his diminutive body up to the pane, Magog, the little evil genius of the camp.

"I begin to see," said the deformed. "I can't look through a stone wall, but I can see into some things which have been dark to me. I wonder what has become of Durac? They tell me that he escaped from the dungeon of the Death Tribunal—that Captain Val and his pards did not get to condemn him after the manner of their merciless court. The tables may turn and the Tribunal be called to pass sentence on its judge."

He slipped back, gliding through the shadows of the camp and did not stop until he was on one of the trails beyond its northern suburbs.

"Hands up there!" suddenly rung out a stern voice.

CHAPTER XXV.

DENOUNCED.

"HEAVENS! what fiend has caught me this time?" exclaimed Magog.

He did not hesitate to throw up his hands for the voice was stern enough to send them without much effort above his head and in a moment he was standing in the gorge with his burned fingers above his head.

"Do you ever pray, Magog?"

"I never do, but in the name of God what do you mean?"

"You are going to die."

Not until now did the deformed man of Wildcat see the person who had halted him.

He caught sight of a figure half-concealed by a huge boulder in the trail—a figure tall though it stooped somewhat and held in its hands not a revolver, as Magog expected to see, but a dagger which was grasped at the point, as if it were to be thrown forward.

"Why should a miserable wretch like me be killed?" he cried. "Whose pathway have I crossed? I live for but one thing—to get even with the man who threw me back into the fire of my own nest years ago."

"Captain Gold-Dust, eh?"

"You have named my only foe."

"But he is dead."

"I have seen the cross over his grave in the canyon."

A low laugh which did not fail to reach Magog's ears was the answer.

"But you haven't prayed, yet, Magog."

The Deformed stood erect and then took a step backward.

"Ho, not a move! If you won't pray you shall die without it."

The figure near the rock came out and the little spy of Wildcat saw the full glitter of the knife.

"Stand up like a man," said the unknown whose face was hidden by a black mask which reached to the chin.

"If it is certain death, I can do that," said Magog. "I am not afraid to die, though I have suffered a thousand deaths. I don't ask who you are. I think I know!"

The hand that gripped the dagger went up and all at once was launched at the little form standing in the clear starlight of the gorge.

A half-stilled cry followed the stroke, and the figure of Magog tottered back and then fell on its face where grass and stones were mingled.

The dagger had gone as straight to Magog's breast as a bullet fired at the same distance, and the little man did not move after touching the ground.

"Another!" was all the lips of the murderer spoke as he turned away and went back. "The knife is unknown and no one saw the throw. He knew too much; his eyes were too sharp. Now, let me trap the keen secret-finder Dagger Dock."

A few minutes later a man entered Wildcat and walked up to the bar of the Golden Trump.

He was Wild Val and those who looked up from their games long enough to see him ere he departed noticed that his eye was full of a certain triumph and that his step was the step of a victor.

"Injuns!" suddenly shouted a man who appeared in the door of the den and faced the players, for every face had been turned to him at the first intimation of danger, and cards had dropped unplayed upon the table.

"Injuns!"

In an instant every man was on his feet, some with revolvers half-drawn and others wishing they had not left their weapons at the shanties.

"What ar' they?"

"In the mountains. The Ravens ar' hoverin' over Wildcat, for I have seen 'em."

The alarmist went to the bar and drained a glass which had been set out for him.

"Their movements are like the movements of shadders," he went on, facing the crowd. "I watched 'em as long as I could and make it here ahead of the gang. Wear' to be wiped out like Tiger Trace war."

There was a movement toward the open door, but at that moment a man appeared there and stopped.

"Injuns, Captain Val!" said half a dozen toughs.

"Who says so?"

"Gold-Gid, yonder."

"Where are they?"

Captain Gold-Dust had turned upon the man who had brought the news, and stopped him in the act of draining another glass.

"They are in the mountains—in the vicinity of the Rounded Rock. I saw them and watched 'em long enough to see that they were bent on mischief, an'—"

"And then you came here to get two straight drinks on the strength of it, eh?"

With a curse, Gold-Gid lowered his glass and sent a mad look toward the man who had twitted him so cuttingly.

"I've never been insulted that way before," he said. "Captain Val talks as though he thought I lied. I saw Injuns in the mountains, and why shouldn't I, after the warning of the swinging head?"

"That's so; why shouldn't they come after that?"

What might have followed these last words if another event had not intervened may never be told.

All at once there sprung into the bar-room, past the burly figure of Captain Gold-Dust, a person whose coming elicited several exclamations of surprise.

"Men of Wildcat, you are in no immediate danger," said this person. "There are Indians in the mountains, but their trail does not lead this night to your camp. I do not say that they will keep back forever the swooping hand, but they will not come now."

Already every eye was riveted upon the speaker, and Wild Val, falling back a step, actually stared at her with a half-frightened look.

"Gentlemen of Wildcat, you have hearts that beat for the afflicted and the deformed. You are not destitute of the nobler feelings of mankind, though this is not an angels' abode. They say in other places that Tiger Trace and Wildcat are the Sodom and Gomorrah of the Southwest; but I deny it. Tiger Trace has been wiped out, and the hand that destroyed it will some day be turned against you, as well. But I am here to tell a story of wrong—to give you the points of as hellish a crime as ever darkened the trails of the Volcanic Hills."

Cyrene, looking more beautiful than ever,

stood erect under the lamps of the Golden Trump, her close-fitting garments speckled here and there with the grime of the hills, and her whip—the lash of which had on several occasions tasted human blood—hanging at her side.

Captain Gold-Dust had a position between Cyrene and the counter.

He was looking at her as he had never looked before, and seemed eager to hear what was about to fall from her lips.

The gambler drew nearer to the beauty from the hills.

"Not long ago there was a harmless song-bird in the mountains; but her singing is hushed, as you know, for some of you who have heard her songs under the stars must have missed her of late. Wild Winnie sings no more where once she awoke the echoes of the mountains. Her last song was suddenly broken by the crack of a rifle, and the song-bird of Arizona fell in the trail."

Murmurs of vengeance fell from the lips of Cyrene's listeners and the girl went on:

"The hand that silenced the poor girl deserves to fall nerveless at its owner's side. It is the hand of one who has hidden from his fellow-men these many years. Why did he check the soft song of the poor demented child of the Volcanic Hills? Ask him, men of Wildcat. He stands before you!"

The dread silence of a moment followed Cyrene's words.

"Heavens, what is to come now?" said Full-Deck Frank who, catching sight of the figure of the beauty of the whip as she crossed the Plaza, stood inside the door and heard every word as it dropped from her tongue.

"The song of the mountain bird is hushed forever. She will never sing again," continued Cyrene. "I once marked the man who silenced her but he 'died,' only to come forth another person, though in his bosom he carries the same guilty heart he brought to this region when hunted like a wolf among the shadows of a great city."

"She knows his history," said the young gambler sport. "Cyrene knows all about Captain Val's past."

A tiger cornered by a hundred hunters could not have eyed the beautiful mystery of the mountains with more intensity than Captain Gold-Dust eyed Cyrene.

He saw that many an eye was regarding him as though he had been described by the narrative which had just been heard. There was a distance of twenty feet between him and the open door.

Suddenly he left the bar which his back was touching and with two cocked six-shooters in his hands stood for a moment in the center of the room.

The crowd in front of him executed a backward movement.

"Behold the man!" cried Cyrene, her hand covering the handsome man on the floor. "Behold the hand that broke forever the song of Wild Winnie, the mad. Gentlemen of Wildcat, you are faced by a double murderer. Behold in Captain Val, the last Judge of the Death Tribunal, the true Captain Gold-Dust—the man who does not fill the grave in Satan's Canyon."

The effect of these words upon the gaping crowd was magical.

"Guard the door!" cried some one. "Let not the guilty wretch escape!"

But quicker than the quickest movement made by the pards of Wildcat was the move which carried Captain Gold-Dust to the threshold of that very door.

In a flash he stood there, covering the whole crowd with the six-shooters and looking over them with the eye of a devil.

His movement seemed to paralyze the entire lot. Revolvers clutched by bronzed hands fell before they were half raised, and their holders stood where they were.

As for Cyrene, a smile wreathed her well-cut lips.

"It is all one. A fate from which he cannot escape awaits him, no matter whither he flees," she said. "The hand of God pursues the man of blood, and vengeance is at his heels like a starved wolf. Let him go, if you fear the revolvers he holds in his hands. Let the crimson Jonah of Wildcat go to his doom if he prefers to meet it away from the noose of the Death Tribunal."

There was a mad oath, and all saw the lips of Captain Gold-Dust quivering with its utterance.

"Good-night, gentlemen of Wildcat," he cried. "I dare the fate that women mention by going to where she says it lies in wait for me. He who tracks me will stand suddenly before the bar of his Maker, and as to the long hunt which she hints at—I am able to see that I stand at the end of it triumphant!"

The hands were not lowered, nor did the eyes of the speaker lose one jot of their tigerishness; but all at once he stepped from the door and was gone.

Those who rushed forward with cocked six-shooters looked out and saw him crossing the Plaza.

For a second he stopped near the post and threw a look at the Golden Trump.

"I will make all concerned remember this night!" he cried. "The bandit nabob is a veritable Death Tribunal in and of himself."

A moment later he was gone.

CHAPTER XXVI.

THE TWO YOUNG BLOODS.

COPELAND, the young Jonah of Tiger Trace, found himself once more without a shelter.

He had been banished from Wildcat; had been escorted out of camp by the agents of the Death Tribunal and now stood alone among the trails of the Volcanic Hills, probably to be hunted by the league by which he had been declared an outlaw.

It was the same night that witnessed the incidents of the chapter just closed and the young man was looking down from an elevated point in the trail upon the lights of Wildcat.

He had kept in the vicinity of the camp, hoping to see Durac. He did not know what events had followed his banishment; was not aware of the finding of the head on the post, nor of the visit of Cyrene and its startling consequences.

The young man leaned against a large rock in the trail and was contemplating the camp when a noise fell upon his ear.

Turning, while not revealing his position, he looked through the prevailing gloom in an attempt to locate the maker of the sound.

Presently there came into the more brilliant starlight the figure of a man.

"You?" said Copeland under his breath while he looked. "I have been wanting to meet you ever since they drove me out of Wildcat as its Jonah. You are the cause of my ill-luck. You have plotted against me, and now that I have caught you alone, by heavens! you shall apologize or fight."

The next moment Copeland moved forward and ere the person so closely watched could see him, his hand fell upon his arm and there was a quick start accompanied by a sharp cry.

Copeland and Full-Deck Frank stood face to face!

They looked like rivals standing there in the dim light of the stars and for a second neither spoke.

"You played your game pretty well. I am banished," said Copeland with some bitterness.

There was no reply, but a malicious smile on the lip of the young sport.

"I have felt your hand wherever fate has thrown us together. You have played trumps against me whenever you could find an opportunity. We will settle the feud here."

Full-Deck Frank looked amazed.

"I mean it," continued Copeland, with resolution. "I mean every word of it. What better place than this? We can fight and leave a body for the vultures that will scent the feast to-morrow."

The gambler-sport of two camps had no intention of carrying his game against Copeland quite that far.

"You won't fight me, eh?" cried Copeland. "You shirk the battle like the serpent that stings its victim and then gets from under his feet. Full-Deck Frank, you must meet me now or be hunted down and shot on sight. I am the Jonah of Tiger Trace, and, as you have told the Death Tribunal, the evil genius of Wildcat. You have served the man known as Captain Gold-Dust. You have been the slave of that wretch who fled from the cities with red hands."

"How know you this?" cried the other.

"Ask me not, but I know all the same. I know that the vengeance-hunter is on his track and that sooner or later he will pay for the crimes of years ago."

"What! Captain Gold-Dust, the dead?"

Copeland laughed.

"The dead? We will say so if that will do any good. The dead? You know the truth: for you know what has become of that man and whether the cross in the canyon is not a lie with its inscription."

There was no reply.

"Come; we are losing time here. Do you refuse to fight the exile of your own making?"

A sudden impulse seemed to take possession of Full-Deck Frank's mind.

"I will fight you, Copeland," he said.

Copeland drew back and laid his hand on the hilt of a dagger.

"Close quarters, eh?" asked the gambler-sport.

"The closer the deadlier," was the quick response.

Full-Deck Frank looked down upon the far-away lights of Wildcat.

He knew what had transpired since the banishment of Copeland; he knew that Durac had been tried and condemned by the Tribunal, but had escaped; that Wild Val (Captain Gold-Dust) had been driven from the camp by the accusations of Cyrene and was once more a hunted man in the mountains.

Should he tell Copeland these things?

He leaned forward and smiled on the eve of imparting his information.

"What made you the slave of that man?" asked Jonah of Tiger Trace.

"Never mind that," said Frank, with a wave of the hand.

"Did he draw you into the toils in some manner? Or, did you come to him and tell him that you wanted to serve some merciless villain? Which, Full-Deck Frank?"

"I will talk after the fight, if I talk on this subject at all," he said.

Copeland fell back to the rock and played with the dagger he had drawn.

The young men were about equally matched in physique. Both were tall and handsome, perfect athletes, and their pose as they stood erect in the starlight was admirable.

"Who are you anyhow, Copeland?" asked Full-Deck Frank, gazing into the adversary's face.

"I am Copeland."

The other smiled.

"But that was not always your name. You have had another?"

"Didn't Captain Gold-Dust ever tell you his suspicions or did he have none?"

"He never told me anything."

"I am a young man with a mystery about him," said Copeland. "I am from the East, but I am an outcast. Why? Captain Gold-Dust should recall a certain transaction in his life before he became the hermit-bandit of these hills. When that man rolled in wealth—when he had everything his own way and counted his dollars by thousands, there dwelt in the shadow of his mansion a family whose poverty was striking. One day there was a robbery of a safe—one of those safes thought to be secure against the cool thieves of the great cities. Thousands were taken. The human ferrets of the city were put to work and one of them found near the safe a button which fitted a spot on the coat of the head of the poor family. It was his button. It had been taken from his coat. That was long ago—long before Captain Gold-Dust became the hunted white deer of the hills. What happened? The doors of Sing Sing opened for the wrong man. He went up the river, but never came down. He was murdered as surely as was the rich man who years afterward was found dead in his house not far from the scene of the robbery. The man who went to Sing Sing for a crime of another was innocent; but he whose testimony sent him there was not so."

Full-Deck Frank did not speak at the end of Copeland's narrative.

"Who am I?" said the young Jonah of the burnt camp. "I am the son of that prisoner. I am the only child of the man who went up for the crime of another."

"Did you flee from the memory of the crime?"

"Not from that. I became a hunter of the guilty. I have been on the trail of the wretch who to enrich himself sent the innocent to his death!"

"Do you expect to find him in this region?"

"I have found him?"

"In Arizona?"

"In Arizona?"

"What should bring him to this land?"

"Another crime. Full-Deck Frank, I have been watching the rise of your master."

"Captain Gold-Dust?"

"The same! That man is the guilty one; he is the villain who sent my father up the river for a crime he never committed. The money obtained by that crime gave him his start. With it he built up a vast fortune which he was adding to when he committed another deed darker, perhaps, than the one I have described."

Full-Deck Frank looked at Copeland with a stare.

"The last crime was murder outright," continued the young man. "Where have you been these ten years that you have never heard of the Great Holden Mystery?"

"I have heard of it," said the young gambler, with a smile.

"Who has not? I have found people who have hid in these mountains all their lives who knew of it, as if the dastardly crime had a fame that was world-wide. But I have said enough. You have played against me more than one secret hand. You have helped to make me the Jonah of Tiger Trace. You have sought to injure me in the eyes of the rough characters of the Volcanic Hills."

"You've crossed my path!" growled Full-Deck Frank.

"I thought so," smiled Copeland. "But I tell you here, on the eve of a duel to the death, that I have never thought of baffling your passion. The girl is mad."

"Mad?" exclaimed Full-Deck Frank. "Who is mad?"

"Wild Winnie, the girl of the hills."

For a moment the young sport stood in the trail, like a person in a dream.

"I haven't spoken of her," he said. "Mad? Of course she is. She is a creature to be pitied."

"Then, why do you hate me for coming between you and the mad girl of Arizona?"

The gambler looked into Copeland's face and moved a step nearer.

"I have not taken time to love any one," said Copeland. "I have been biding my time, for vengeance is to be satiated. I did not know, until I felt your secret persecutions, that I had come between you and love."

"You should have kept your distance!"

"Why didn't you come to me like a man and tell me all?"

Full-Deck Frank appeared to shrink from the eyes that were looking him through.

"If you loved the mad girl, why didn't you protect her?"

"I never loved her," cried the young sport.

"I never thought of her but in pity. I did not love her."

All at once a light seemed to break in upon Copeland's mind.

"Ho, was it the other one?" he asked.

Full-Deck Frank flushed, showing plainly that the arrow had gone home.

"Beware of the whip," laughed Copeland.

"I see you have a mark now. Do you carry the autograph of the mountain beauty?"

A curse fell from Frank's tongue.

"I see! I see!" said the other. "She was in a marking mood when she gave you the lash. I will not fight you, Full-Deck Frank. Cyrene has settled the score I have held against you, and—"

"By heavens, you shall fight now! One of us shall lie where we stand, for the scavengers of the skies. Be on your guard, Copeland!"

The blade of the gambler-lover leaped above his head; he went forward like a tiger, but the eye of Copeland was on the alert, and his hand caught the descending wrist, and held it as in a grip of iron.

CHAPTER XXVII.

HUNTER AND HUNTED.

"THREE times I have lost it within an hour. These trails are deceptive. One follows one awhile, when, presto! it vanishes never to be picked up again. It is worse than tracking a criminal through the shadows of Gotham."

Durac, the speaker, stood near the bank of a rushing torrent which was known as the Devil's Tide. It was a singular body of water, for every now and then it disappeared into the very bosom of the earth, as it were, to emerge some miles on, and, for a spell, dance in [the sunlight, only to take another freak and lose itself again as before.

Four days had passed since his miraculous escape from the dungeons of the Death Tribunal of Wildcat, and he found himself in the very heart of the mountains, a man with a mission and the same watcher and tracker he had been for years.

Durac of Hurricane Ledge was about to turn back for he had lost the footsteps he had followed for some distance along the bank of the strange river when a figure came in sight on the opposite shore.

In an instant the man crouched and hugged the ground.

The river in some places was not deep, for he had forded it several times during his hunt, and where he had seen the man was a ford which one could wade.

To Durac's chagrin, however, the person he had seen for a moment vanished, and the Man from Hurricane sprung up and gazed across the stream.

Did Durac know that the tables had been turned on Wild Val—that the hand of Cyrene of the Whip had caused his banishment from Wildcat, and that the Death Tribunal had another head?

Somewhere was the exile of the toughs—somewhere was the man called Wild Val, though Durac was almost ready to swear that another name was rightfully his.

After awhile Durac plunged into the swift stream and crossed. He emerged on the other bank wet and dripping, but found in the yellowish earth footprints of the man he had seen.

The Man from Hurricane followed these some distance until he became aware that the river had again disappeared.

Durac halted on the bank and looked at the spot where the volume of water seemed to sink into the earth. The day had vanished and the last footsteps he had seen were barely visible near the fringe of the lost tide.

Half an hour later the hunter stood in an underground chamber which he had reached by an act of daring. He had deliberately plunged into the whirlpool and let it suck him down until he was enabled to scramble from the dark tide and gain a bank amid total darkness.

The venture had panned out according to Durac's desperate theory.

He stood underground and in what was the sunken territory of the Devil's Tide.

Durac leaned against the black wall of the place and heard the drip-drip of the water as it fell from his garments.

He could not see an inch before him, and it seemed as though he had invaded the very heart of some Egyptian tomb.

For some time the Man from Hurricane Ledge saw nothing, and then a light flashed up, but far away.

It came nearer while the man waited, and he made out a moving figure under it.

Hugging the wall where there happened to be a natural niche, he drew a knife and stood still.

The little torch moved in and out, as if the trail were a winding one, and at last halted within fifty feet of where he stood.

"I shall know something now. I may have followed some one to his secret abode, and whether this adventure nets me anything or not, I shall have found one of the hidden regions traversed by the Devil's Tide."

Durac now saw that the person who held the torch was a tall, well-built man, who had set the flame in the wall while he took down from a shelf above him a suit of dry garments.

"I thought so!" cried the watcher under his breath. "What more do I want than this? This rewards me for all my long hunt. This pays me for the trip across the continent. My man stands before me! I see in the light of your torch Bolivar Blake, the millionaire assassin."

In truth, the man before Durac was Wild Val of Wildcat; in other words, Captain Gold-Dust, the man twice dead; and Durac was looking at him with all eyes.

With the utmost complacency, Captain Gold-Dust exchanged his wet clothes for others, and then moved back over the ground to which he had come to the spot.

Durac was forced to lower his body in order to reach the place where the bandit-nabob had stood, but he gained it in safety, and struck off on the trail once more.

He was as anxious to trace the course of the underground tide as to discover the dimensions of the strange retreat, and it was not difficult to follow the torch which went ahead.

The tread of Durac, the ferret, was like that of a cat; he had drawn his boots, and his dripping feet made no noise, though they left a track on the dusty trail of the dark place.

Wild Val led the trailer a long hunt, but stopped at last, and stood against a wall with the light of the torch falling across his figure.

"Found at last for certain! There is no mistake now," said Durac to himself. "You are Bolivar Blake, the maker of the Great Holden Mystery; you are the man believed by a million people to be dead and buried; you are the guilty wretch, to find whom I have crossed the continent at the will of a woman. It was not Morel's head that was found on the table in Tiger Trace; but I guess you know this now, Captain Gold-Dust."

For some time Durac continued to watch the man in the cavern, with the sound of waters in the ears.

The hunted man seemed to be fighting a mental battle, for now and then the torch revealed the knitting brows, and Durac could see that he was worried.

"He escaped, and that when I had him in the net," suddenly cried Captain Gold-Dust, starting from the wall. "I had him in the grip of the Tribunal, whose head I became for a purpose. If the man called Carl Clutch was really in the dungeon six months ago and escaped from it, why was not his hand in this last rescue? Why didn't I hear of this escaped bird before I saw what he cut on the stone? I have to turn on both of them if they live. I have to fight this man who calls himself Durac, when, in reality, he is *her* ferret. Morel's head, eh?"

Captain Gold-Dust laughed. "What a foolish mistake it was!" he went on, every word falling distinctly on Durac's ears. "Yet, it was a natural one, for the interior of the shanty was not very light, and he was at the table. The next time there will be no blunder—no mistake will be made when I have another opportunity. I would like to see Full-Deck Frank, the young man who has become my rival, but who carries on his face the marks of Cyrene's affection. God! how lovely she looked as she covered me with her finger and drove me into exile again! Wait, my beauty. My time will come, and I promise you that it is not far distant."

"Neither is mine," said the watcher under his breath, and in another moment Durac had seen the man depart, carrying with him the torch which still revealed his whereabouts.

Some time afterward the Man from Hurricane Ledge felt the ground slipping from under his feet, and before he could recover he fell into the tide which rushed so madly through the shades of the unknown and was battling with the waters.

Durac found that all his strength was needed to enable him to stem the current, but the rolling stones at the bottom threw him as often as he gained his feet and swimming in that swift tide was out of the question.

All at once his hands thrown upward came in contact with something to which they clung, and he discovered that the stream was bridged at that point by a swinging structure which was not wide enough to let more than one person cross at a time.

A hearty ejaculation of thankfulness fell from Durac's lips as he drew himself up on the bridge and caught his breath.

He lay there like a person completely exhausted.

Suddenly there flashed in his face a light from which he fell with a half-smothered cry.

As it advanced he found that it was a torch in the hands of Captain Gold-Dust and that the hunted bandit-nabob of the Volcanic Hills was about to step upon the bridge.

Durac hugged the log upon which he had

drawn his body and eyed his prey with the ferocity of a tiger.

He seemed to count the steps of the hunted prey as he advanced, the light above his head and streaming over the waters from which he lately pulled himself—a veritable death-tide.

On, on came Captain Gold-Dust. His feet touched the bridge and the next moment he was up on it.

Durac, holding in his hand the dagger he had drawn at the last moment, though calling to mind his last promise to the widow of Gotham, never took his eyes from the bandit of the hills.

Nearer and nearer came Captain Gold-Dust, his tall figure looking more giant-like than ever in the glow of his torch, and his eyes seeming to search the stream he was crossing.

Durac had pulled himself up on the bridge in the very center and over the swiftest part of the tide.

Beneath him and not very far rushed the dark waters of the hidden river, going no one knew whither for not a soul had ever floated to the end of its journey.

All at once the light carried by Captain Gold-Dust fell upon the man on the bridge and in his very path.

At the same time Durac sprang to his feet and faced the bandit-nabob.

There was a sudden halt and then a start on Captain Gold-Dust's part; the torch was transferred to the left hand and a dagger leaped from the sash which encircled the waist.

"Durac!" cried the man "twice dead." "I did not expect to find you here."

The answer was a challenge of eye which the hunted man accepted, for he threw one foot forward and then cast the torch into the river.

It sunk with a hiss like a burning rocket.

The following moment, with the leap of a tiger, Captain Gold-Dust went at the man in his way; the two came together, the bridge swaying violently with the collision, and a knife came down in the darkness to meet in mid-air a hand which checked its course.

"You have unmasked yourself at last!" said a voice. "You are more than Durac of Hurricane Ledge."

"And you more than Captain Gold-Dust and Wild Val. You are Bolivar Blake, the hunted millionaire of New York."

The curse that followed the last words was answer enough.

Back and forth on the frail foot-bridge over the underground river swayed the hunter and his human prey.

No use for masks now.

Durac was Monk Morel and Captain Gold-Dust the nabob murderer of Gotham.

All at once the bridge seemed to slip from one of its moorings.

Another furious lurch by the men and its hand-rail touched the water.

The next instant there was a loud cracking.

The river had engulfed all!

CHAPTER XXVIII.

IN NEW FEATHERS.

BACK once more in the City of Secrets!

As far as eye can sweep Broadway there are brilliant lights which throw their beams far out into the street.

The hour is early and the street thronged with people of every age and condition.

A man whose tall figure and elegant manners make him a mark for thousands, steps out of a carriage that waits for him near the curb and disappears in an open doorway.

In a small room on the second floor of the building he has entered sits another man apparently waiting for him, for the moment he enters the waiting one smiles and asks him to lock the door.

"The change is a remarkable one," says the man at the table, or desk. "You are as safe here as though you were at the uttermost ends of the world. You did not have to hide these ten years to secure this metamorphosis."

"Maybe not, but I thought I would be sure of it," is the smiling reply. "What have you discovered?"

"Nothing that need alarm you."

The last speaker is a well-known character of the great city—one of the best, as well as the most unscrupulous, human ferrets within its boundaries.

Everybody knows him. It is well known that Sidney Cerberus has a thousand threads of crimes at his fingers' ends all the time; that he never fails when set upon a trail, no matter how covered it be with mystery. He always runs down his game; has crossed the ocean and tracked his man through Europe, only to bring him home—that is if the villain's gold did not outweigh the reward of Justice.

For a moment there is no further conversation between the two men in the detective's office, but at last the new-comer speaks.

"Neither of them could come back without your knowledge?" he says.

"It would be impossible."

"That seems to settle it," is the reply.

"Of course you are safe here. In you who would think of looking for a man dead and

buried? And, then, you are carrying out the deception to perfection. You ought to turn detective."

The other smiles and runs his hand through his dark beard of exquisite silkiness.

"It must have been a terrible experience—the one in the underground cavern."

"It was. When I felt the bridge giving way beneath us I gave up and tried to throw myself into the water, while I tore loose from Monk Morel; but he dragged me down into the dark stream and, as I have told you, I knew nothing until I came back to life on the banks of the Devil's Tide. I want no more such experiences."

"I should think not. But, after all, it was a fortunate adventure. It relieved you of as persistent a tracker as ever lived."

"Beyond question Morel was a Man with a Mission, if ever there was one," replied the black-bearded person. "Think of him assuming the character of Durac of Hurricane Ledge and coming right into the jaws of death."

"That was the man all over," was the response. "He feared nothing. He regarded his word as his oath, and if he swore to hunt you down at the instigation of the Widow Holden, why, nothing but death could stop him."

"I meet old faces on the street every day. I run across them in out-of-the-way places and, they look at me, but without a sign of recognition."

"Of course. You are 'dead,' I say. Don't you know that Bolivar Blake sleeps in Greenwood?"

"He was picked up in the river and they wept over him ere they laid him away in the family vaults."

Both men, the detective and his visitor, laughed together.

"The story of your life since you left New York is like a thrilling romance. You found some strange characters in the Southwest."

"Arizona is full of them."

"The one that interests me most is the beauty who used the whip to mark those she did not fancy."

"Cyrene? I wish I knew her history. You see, when I came out of the underground caverns and looked once more upon the light, things had changed. The Ravens had swooped down upon Wildcat, as they had upon Tiger Trace; there had been a desperate battle between tough and Indian, but Owlet, the destroyer, had won the day and I saw a heap of smoldering logs where once had been the camp of the gamblers of the Volcanic Hills. Of course I did not venture down to count the dead, but made up my mind to come back here and, as Burt Butler, lead another life. I am not a beggar, as you know, and with the trackers dead and the bones of Bolivar Blake moldering in Greenwood, there is no danger in being unmasked."

"Yes, Cyrene was a beauty. I wish you could have seen her the night she drew her lash across my face and made the blood trickle down my beard. There are few women like her on top of ground and here, with a little training, she would make a superb society queen. And there was young Copeland, the Jonah of Tiger Trace who is said to have reached Wildcat just when the fight for life was at its height and who perished with the rest. And my friend, Full-Deck Frank, who has not been seen since the night of the swoop. You see I had many friends in the Southwest, and of all I am the only living actor in the drama that ended a year ago, unless Cyrene still plies her whip on the border—marking Greaser faces and crimsoning a few serapes."

The returned man took from his pocket an elegant cigar case and handed it to the detective.

"I have employed you to keep your eyes and ears open, Cerberus," he went on. "While I run a fine establishment almost in the shadow of my old home, I want to be perfectly secure. The first sign of danger must reach me at once."

"It shall."

"Remember! You are my man and in my employ. I have not hesitated to share with you the secret I have kept so long. I don't think I undervalue your coolness. I knew you years ago, but you have learned cunning since and I am going to trust you to the end."

"You may trust your life in the hands of Sidney Cerberus," said the detective proudly.

"You told me the other day that the widow has aged much since that night," said Butler in a moment. "She has. I saw her yesterday in the park."

"Did she see you?"

"Yes; she lost her veil and I had the pleasure of handing it to her."

"That was a test," laughed the ferret.

"She looked me straight in the eye when she thanked me, and drove off."

"And yet she has said that she would know you among a thousand! I tell you, you are safe here."

For a moment the two men sat and smoked in silence.

Every now and then the detective studied the face of the man across the table and a smile would ripple his countenance.

He was right. No one would see in the man who had invaded his room the person for whom

the detectives of Gotham had hunted high and low.

Surely this man was not the millionaire Bolivar Blake who was the supposed assassin of Holden, the nabob, whose widow had never ceased to keep men on the trail?

Nobody knew that he was living, for had he not been taken from the river at low tide and, after identification, hauled to the cemetery and buried in the family vaults?

Why should any one look for him?

After awhile the detective's visitor arose and stood erect.

"You have grown some," said Cerberus.

"I don't know," laughed the other. "I have broadened out. You could not expect Captain Gold-Dust and Bolivar Blake to look very much alike."

The last words were spoken in a whisper followed by a light laugh, and the next moment Butler was at the door.

"I don't know what I will get at," said he, looking over his shoulder. "A dead man can't do much, you know. I have a fine house and guess I have done enough to play the man of leisure the rest of my days, or while I inhabit New York. Remember, Cerberus! If you see a shadow I am to be warned at once."

"At once!" was the reply.

A minute afterward the detective of Gotham was alone and heard the feet of the Mystery on the stairs.

"What a life he has had and what a sensation the revelation would create," he said, half aloud. "Of all the cases I have ever had anything to do with, this is the strangest. There is a mine of wealth in it for me! He saw that he must have a shadow to watch for him and so he came to me. Men jostle him who believe him dead; they address the man they think they saw at the Morgue, and would tell him if he were to ask them that he is as dead as a door-nail. It is a singular case."

By this time Captain Gold-Dust—we may still call him by the name most familiar to the reader—had reached his carriage and was driven off.

In a short time the vehicle deposited him in front of a large house, which he entered with a night-key.

In the parlor he threw himself down upon a rich sofa and rung a bell.

In a moment there were the sounds of gliding feet in the house, and a servant appeared to know his bidding.

"Was any one here, Motter?" he asked.

"Yes, sir. A woman called, but I got rid of her and she didn't like it very much."

"A woman?" echoed Captain Gold-Dust, with rising interest.

"Yes, sir."

"Did she leave no card—nothing to indicate who she might be and why she had called?"

"She would tell me nothing, though I asked about her errand. I grew a little suspicious and watched her covertly from the door. She joined a man at the corner."

There was just the slightest sign of anxiety at the corners of the bandit-nabob's mouth.

"What was this woman like, Motter? I want to be prepared for her should she come back."

"I suppose there are a thousand women like her in New York, but I never saw any of them. To be sure she wasn't dressed unlike her sisters, still, she didn't seem to like the clothes she wore, as if she wasn't at home in a city wardrobe; really, I don't know just how to express my meaning."

And the servant laughed at his own confusion.

Captain Gold-Dust dismissed the man with the injunction to take a good look at the woman should she come again; not only this, but to follow her if he could do so unseen, and then fell back with a smoke wreath above his head.

"My God! can it be that tiger beauty?" he cried, springing to his feet. "I think Cerberus ought to know of this call. It might give him a clow."

In another minute he was on the street and going back to the detective's office.

What if his secret was unsafe? What if the "tiger beauty," as he called a certain creature, knew that Burt Butler was Captain Gold-Dust, alias Bolivar Blake, the millionaire assassin?

Had he come back to Gotham for this?

CHAPTER XXIX.

SHADOWS.

CAPTAIN GOLD-DUST did not find Sidney Cerberus, the detective, at home on his second call.

The little office on the second floor was locked, and after a spell he went down upon the street once more.

New York seemed to have changed a good deal to him during his enforced absence in the wild Southwest.

The streets did not seem the same ones he used to tread as Bolivar Blake, and several times he had found himself lost for a little while.

On this particular night, desirous of finding the man to whom he had intrusted his secret, he pushed down one of the avenues leading from Broadway and stopped in the shadow of a house which looked like it was untenanted.

"He may be in there, for there is where he sleeps if he sleeps at all," muttered the branded-

millionaire. "He told me once that he lived here, and I must post him about the woman who called when I was not at home."

He was in the act of going up the steps when the front door opened and a figure came out.

"The dead alive!" ejaculated Captain Gold-Dust, falling back to the nearest shadow, and the next moment he was staring at the person as if his eyes would desert his head.

"Not at home, eh?" said the man on the step. "I must wait till he returns, but I won't wait here."

Down the steps he came and moved away.

"I thought the Ravens finished him with the rest," said Captain Gold-Dust, watching the fitting figure. "When did he come, and is he the man whom my caller met at the corner?"

If he could have watched the stranger home, he would have seen him enter a house on a prominent street and dodging up a dark stairway open a door which ushered him into a small room on the second floor.

"Did you find out anything?" asked a voice, and the man, who was young, was confronted by a woman who at that moment came out of an adjoining room.

"Not much," called, but did not get so much as a glimpse of him.

"I did not get to see my man, so, on that score we are quits."

"Look here, may you not be mistaken?" said the man, seating himself and looking up into the face of the woman who had halted at his side.

"Don't say that. I have everything to make me certain. I would not be mistaken for the world."

"I believe that, Cyrene."

"There! I have given you your orders, yet you don't obey them," was the quick response.

"I am not Cyrene, but Zoe."

"Well, Zoe, then."

"That is better. No, not for the world would I be mistaken. I have seen him and I know my man. He can't hide from the eye that used to see him as Captain Gold-Dust, the hermit-bandit of the Southwest."

The eyes glowed and the speaker who was dark-eyed clinched her hands.

"When are you going to unmask him?" asked the man in the chair.

"I don't know."

"You don't intend to let him carry out the threat made in the camp which Owlet wiped out of existence?"

"What was that?"

"That he would live to get even with you for the lashing you gave him once."

"He shall never get even—not unless he catches me asleep. What would not Durac of Hurricane give if he were living and could see this man back in New York among those who believed him dead?"

"By Heavens! I wish that man were living," cried the other. "I will never forget the morning they found the severed head on the table in Tiger Trace, nor what a thrill it gave me when I first looked at it. We know now whose head it was, though, for a time, I thought Morel had lost his skull. Poor Nate Newsome! He dropped into too many cabins to write, and Morel, the bloodhound, was shrewd enough to take advantage of the severed head and afterward turn up as Durac from Hurricane Ledge. It was a cool head, his was, but Captain Gold-Dust won in the end, and now, so far as I know, there is not a ferret on his trail—indeed, one of the best in the city is in his employ."

The woman did not answer for a little while, but went to the window watched by the young man behind her.

Her figure was agile and willowy in outline. There was a sleek grace in every movement, a fascinating, cat-like step and a bewitching smile when she allowed it to brighten an otherwise impassive face.

All at once she turned and came back to her companion.

"What if he should escape us, Harry?" she said. "What if, after all, this man whom we have tracked from the wilds of the Southwest should get away? I dare not think of this. If we only had Durac here! If the Man with a Mission—for you know who he was, and why he came West—was here to help us, we would be sure to succeed. But Wild Val won the last toss."

"It looks that way, Zoe. There are other ferrets here."

"Yes, but none like Durac. He gave me his whole history one night in the hills and afterward, in return, I gave him those old papers which had come into my possession—papers which I believe told the secret of the Lost Presidio. They must have fallen into Captain Gold-Dust's hands, and are now stored away until he wants to use them. But that man is back in New York."

"And so are we," smiled the person who listened.

"Would it be well to impart the secret to Mrs. Holden?" asked Zoe.

"What do you think? You know she sent Morel out?"

"Yes, and Carl Clutch before him."

"But Clutch did not get to play much of a hand."

"He never turned up after he wrote on the wall of the dungeon of his history and a brief account of his captivity."

"He died when Wildcat fell."

"You never told me this before."

"There was no occasion for the telling," was the reply. "You may not know that Carl Clutch was Cold-Deck Dan and that he was the man who, belonging to the Death Tribunal, liberated Durac."

The woman's reply was a strange look, but she suddenly removed her gaze from her companion.

"I don't like this city," she said. "I am going back."

"But not before you have finished the game against this fiend in human shape?"

"No."

"If Mrs. Holden knew the secret shut up in the fine house on the avenue she would have it surrounded by police before morning."

"I believe you, and if Captain Gold-Dust knew who inhabits this little house he would play a hand that would startle the city."

Both smiled.

A minute later the young man strode toward the door, but with his hand on the latch he turned and looked back.

"Zoe, you told me once that before this game was played out the Ravens would reappear," he said.

"Their hand shall appear in it."

"In this city?"

"In New York."

His face was a study.

"I puzzle you," she said with a laugh. "You do not see how an Indian of Arizona can take a hand in a man-hunt in the heart of this city."

"I confess that I do not."

"It is because you don't know the far-reaching cunning of these red-serpents," she went on. "I knew them long before fate threw us together; I was an inmate of an Indian lodge for months. I know the Moquis. Why, when the scoundrels of Rolling Stone City sent me into exile because I sheltered an outcast, I was received by these red people and came to know them well."

"Is he here now?"

"Owlet?"

"Yes."

"He is not."

The eyes of the couple met and the young man did not press the inquiry.

"I don't quite understand her; yet I would give all I possess in the world to know that she sometimes thinks of me," he said when he found himself on the street. "Cyrene is as much a mystery now as when she cut men with her whip in the wild Southwest. She is determined to avenge the death of Wild Winnie, the white sweetheart of the red destroyer. And she says that he is coming—that the man who led his Ravens against the gambler sports is actually going to make a trail of blood in this city. I can't think that. Why, he would be a marked man from the moment of his arrival."

Copeland passed on, wending his way through the streets of New York and at last entered a hotel where he was seen to start as if an apparition had sprung up in his path.

"Think of Satan and he appears," cried Copeland. "The red whirlwind has come!"

There had passed him at that moment a young person whose face was dark and whose black hair had lately been cropped.

"There was a time when he would have sacrificed his right arm rather than his hair," continued Copeland, gazing after his person. "He is a marked man already. Everybody is looking at him. Why, he will be seen by Captain Gold-Dust within twenty-four hours and before he knows where he nests."

The Indian, dressed in civilized garments, had passed from the building, and Copeland, anxious to see where he went, hurried to the sidewalk but he was gone.

"He vanishes here like he used to on the trail," said he with a smile. "Woe to you, Captain Gold-Dust, if this red tiger finds you out before you discover him!"

Copeland came back and saw a man leaning over the desk with his finger running up and down the pages of the register.

As he caught sight of the figure it turned and faced him.

Copeland felt an involuntary recoil, and screened himself by a pillar which offered itself at that moment.

Standing before him was Burt Butler, the man who had just left the counter.

"I wish Cyrene could see him," thought the young man. "She ought to be here with her whip. He is handsomer than ever, and it is not to be wondered that no one knows him. Why, he might walk through all the camps of Arizona and not be recognized. Is he looking for Owlet? He is a minute too late."

Captain Gold-Dust walked out amid the smoke of a cigar, and Copeland, who was watching him and no one else, did not see the man who quietly left a seat in the lobby, and sauntered toward the door.

When the Jonah of Tiger Trace turned from the pillar which had sheltered him, and started

toward the sidewalk, he felt a thrill of keen pleasure.

In a moment, however, it was changed for a feeling of surprise, for a man had stepped to his side.

"My boy, how are you? No words! Look me in the eye. Ah, you know me. That is enough."

Copeland was staring with all his might. His blood seemed to stand at rest; he felt his cheek pale, but he seized the speaker's hand, and, despite the command of the eyes he looked into, could not keep back the word that bubbled to his lips, but it was only whispered:

"Durac!"

CHAPTER XXX.

THE RED TRACKER.

COPELAND had a good memory.

The man before him was Durac, the Man from Hurricane Ledge.

For a moment the twain stood together in the hotel, and then Durac spoke again.

"I want to see you, but keep my secret—for the present, at least," he whispered, at the same time slipping into Copeland's hand a card that held an address. "The game is here, eh, Copeland? That is enough."

Half a minute later the man called Durac walked from the building, and Copeland was left in a maze as he wondered how that man had come back from the dead; but there was no time for speculation, and in a little while he too was on the sidewalk, and under the lights of Gotham.

Burt Butler made a final effort to find his detective.

He went once more to the little office on the second floor. This time he found the door unlocked, and entered.

Though the gas was turned on, Sidney Cerberus was not to be seen, and hoping he would drop in presently, the bandit-nabob took a chair and waited.

The midnight hour was being struck by the numerous clocks of the city, and the tones of several near by came to his ears.

All at once the door opened and Captain Gold-Dust was about to address the visitor as Cerberus, when he stared at him with his heart in his throat, as it were.

"When will the captain be in?" asked the new-comer.

"I can't tell. I am waiting for him myself."

"Hol! Been here long?"

"A few minutes."

By this time the stranger was at the table near which the Mystery sat and was looking at him with something of a stare.

After awhile he drew back and Butler found himself alone, but the moment the man left the room he crossed it with a movement like the velvet bound of a tiger and watched the figure that went down the stair.

"He didn't know me," he chuckled, coming back to the table, but not resuming his seat. "He looked straight into my eyes, and, for a second, I thought I had been recognized, but all at once he gave it up and appeared to smile to himself."

"He had the eyes of a man I used to know, but, hang it all, that man is dead," said the man who had seen Captain Gold-Dust in the detective's room. "He's the same person I saw on the street the other day, and he gave me quite a shock, and if I hadn't been a witness at the post-mortem when he was fished from the river ten years ago, I wouldn't sleep to-night for those eyes up there. Looked for all the world like Bolivar Blake's; but a dead man can't have such orbs; that's certain."

Captain Gold-Dust waited in vain for Sidney Cerberus, and it was early morning when, tired and disgusted with his long wait, he quitted the place.

His feet made a strange sound on the sidewalk, and when he ran up the steps of the house he occupied and entered he threw himself exhausted upon a sofa.

"I'll see him to-morrow," he said to himself. "If I have been tracked from the camps I must know it, and my detective shall watch the trackers. I want to know who the woman was and who she met on the corner after she called."

If Copeland had waited at the hotel where he encountered both Durac and the Indian he would not have seen either come back.

The latter seemed to have strolled into the house by accident, and had slipped to another part of the city where, in the early gray of dawn, he emerged from a small house and slipped into a little Park near at hand.

He seemed out of place in the garments he wore and there was about him to the close observer an uneasiness of manner which threatened to make trouble for himself.

He took several turns through the Park, but all at once walked rapidly toward a man who had caught his eye.

They met in the first shadows of some trees.

"Well, what have you seen?" asked the person who had come up.

The Indian shook his head.

"The trails of the white-man's city are not those of the mountain. There I would have found him ere this but here I am lost."

"It is because you know the mountains better than you know the city," was the answer.

"Yes."

"You will get used to the trail here before long."

"But I want to find him soon. You know that others want him and that the man who hunted him among the camps is here?"

"What, have you seen him?"

The Indian nodded.

"If he is here he has the advantage; for he knows the tangled streets of Gotham as the huntsman knows the woods. There is no discounting Monk Morel; he was a ferret when he went West and if he is back and on this man's trail, no grass will be permitted to grow under his feet."

The Indian scowled till his brow grew darker than ever.

"Do you know that your man, if here, may secure the services of some detective to play his hand for him while he hides?"

"Some trailer?"

"Yes."

"If all you have told me is true he has money enough to hire the best talent in the city and there are men here who will work for him no matter what he has been and who he is."

For a moment the Indian did not speak.

"I have not left the lodges of the Moquis to be finally beaten," he said, at last. "I am on the trail of the double faced demon of the Volcanic Hills whom I have trailed to the city where it is said he committed a crime years ago. I have followed him across the country as the eagle follows the antelope. I have located him in the city of his former exploits and I shall not go back empty handed."

"I admire your grit, but if Monk Morel catches him he will hold him fast for, once caught, nothing slips through that detective's hands. I know the man."

"Durac they called him among the hills," said the Indian. "They said once that he lost his head, but it was the head of the madman who fled from his fortune."

"It would be luck for you if Monk Morel had lost his head."

"I want you to show me how to find this street and that. Show me how the trails run in this city. You know the streets of the white-man's home. You know where they cross and where the rich live and the poor dwell."

"It's a life study, chief."

"I promise to pick it up in a little time!" was the quick retort.

"Let us go to my rooms, then. I will show you the map and give you your first lesson."

The red-skin followed willingly, and the couple entered a room near by.

A map of the city was spread on the table and the white man, who was young and eager, began to trace lines across it.

"Too much to learn!" suddenly cried the Indian, rising and pushing the map aside. "I will find him without all that work. There are too many trails here; all seem alike. I will take the Indian's plan and go straight to my game."

The white looked up astonished.

"You won't take the lesson, then?"

"No!"

"Then, I can do no more. I fear you will have a time striking the trail of the man you are looking for. I won't give your secret away."

"Better not."

In an instant the Indian was bending over the man in the chair and his eyes seemed to look him through.

"Better not!" he repeated. "I never lose the game I hunt!"

"By Jove, I believe it! I wish you success."

Another contemptuous glance at the map followed and the Indian went to the door.

"Which way does the big trail run?" he asked.

"Broadway? North and south."

"Good! I can get my bearings here as well as in the mountains," and, the door shut, leaving the white man alone.

"It's singular that I should pick up that Indian as I did," he said, aloud. "He is here on a trail and from what he tells me, he intends to have the life of the man he seeks. Now, if he had only gone a little further and told me more, I should have learned who the victim is and perhaps have made a stake. Why not try it, anyhow?"

He turned his chair to the table and began to write.

"All I know is that the man he wants once went by the name of Captain Gold-Dust," he went on. "That might be enough to start on. I'll try it, anyhow."

In a minute he had written this:

"CAPT G. D—, OF ARIZONA:—

"I have information for you. Write. 'Noremac.' This office."

He carried the notice to the office of one of the large newspapers, and went off to await developments.

That very day, shortly after the afternoon edition had been rattled off, he inquired at the office and was handed a letter.

It named a place and hour for an interview,

and the moment he entered the room he found himself face to face with Sidney Cerberus.

"Was that your work?" cried the detective, with a laugh.

"It was my work, but, by Jove! I didn't expect to see you here."

"I'm here. What do you know?"

The Indian's friend looked at the ferret whom he knew well by sight, and then asked "what it was worth."

"It is according to the information," was the reply.

"Then, here goes. There's an Indian looking for Captain Gold-Dust."

Sidney Cerberus did not start, though his eyes betrayed the value of the information.

"Where is he stopping?"

The man gave the detective the red-skin's address.

Ten minutes later, with a heavier purse, the betrayer stood on the sidewalk and went off and drank to the success of his little scheme.

"The Indian here?" exclaimed a handsome man, who was confronted by the detective in his own house.

"The Indian is here!"

For a moment Captain Gold-Dust sat like a statue, speaking not, but looking into the face before him.

"That—trailing—devil—must be trapped!" he said, deliberately.

Sidney Cerberus looked up at him and smiled.

"He can be," he said.

"He must be caught within twenty-four hours."

"It can be done."

"It must be no simple arrest," said Captain Gold-Dust. "It must be silence forever! Do you understand?"

The detective nodded.

"In God's name, how did he strike the trail? Why, he is almost as persistent as Morel was. Heavens! what a team those two would have made!"

Sidney Cerberus walked from the bandit-nabob's retreat commissioned. He was to entrap a red tracker from Arizona—Owlet, the chief of the Ravens.

CHAPTER XXXI.

THE MAN WITH A MISSION ONCE MORE.

BURT BUTLER knew the meaning of the Indian's presence in New York.

If he had known that another person far more dangerous than the Moqui had reached the city, he might have doubted Sidney Cerberus's ability to defeat the plans of the foe.

But he was to make this discovery for himself; he was to receive the shock of this new thunderbolt in a manner entirely unlooked for.

For some time after his detective's departure the hunted nabob remained thoughtful in the room.

Now and then he paced the floor like a tiger, measuring by rapid strides the dimensions of his cage; or stood erect in the center of the chamber with fire in his eyes and clinched hands.

"I have imparted my secret to but one person since coming back," he suddenly said. "I have intrusted it to no one but Cerberus and it is safe in his hands. I would like to see another person. I would like to cross the threshold of her house, but dare I? It seems like poking my head into a fiery furnace; but I have been seen by her, yet she made no sign that she knew me."

He stood in front of a long mirror and surveyed his figure therein.

"She wouldn't know me after dark at any rate," he went on. "I like risks. No one will be wiser for the side trail and it would be the supreme test."

He left the mansion with a cool design tugging at his heart.

Half an hour later he ran up a certain flight of stone steps and rung a bell.

This visit was the acme of coolness.

He stood at the door of the Holden mansion; he had rung the bell and was waiting for a response.

Beyond this coolness and foolhardiness could not go.

Presently steps sounded in the hall and when the door opened Captain Gold-Dust looked into the face of the wife of the murdered millionaire.

Mrs. Holden had responded to the call in person, something she did very often, and in another moment he was following her into the parlor.

"Madam," said he, handing her a card which he had prepared before leaving his own house, "I am here in the interest of delayed Justice, though I suppose you have heard these words before."

A faint smile appeared at the widow's mouth. She had glanced at the card and read thereon:—"Paul Palafox, Detective," and was twirling the tiny bit of pasteboard in her hand.

"I am always ready to listen to men of your kind. I have employed a good many during the last ten years, and if you have anything to offer, I am ready to hear you."

"I am aware that you still cling to the belief that Bolivar Blake is among the living—that the body said to be his was another's."

"I am confident that it was. Nothing can ever turn me from this conviction."

"But all your detectives have failed. You have sent some out West, I am told."

Mrs. Holden started.

"I sent two thitherr, and that is the only act I have ever reproached myself with. Those men went to their doom, for they never came back to report."

"Maybe they deserted your cause."

"I had more confidence in them than that. The first one might not have been as faithful as the last, but in Monk Morel I had all the confidence in the world."

Captain Gold-Dust kept his composure.

"The Great Holden Mystery has interested me ever since I heard of it," he went on. "Madam, I am at your service. I like your courage of conviction. There are few mysteries too deep for me. I have gone to the bottom of all I have sought to solve, and the darkly mysterious charms me."

Mrs. Holden leaned back in her chair and looked at the man who had spoken.

"Aren't you the gentleman who handed me my veil in the Park?" she asked.

"I am."

"I thought so."

"Your face attracted me, and an inquiry let me into the old story of that famous crime."

"Infamous, rather!" cried the widow. "During these ten years of mystery I have forgotten nothing. The face of Bolivar Blake, as I saw it last, is always before me. I should know it among a thousand. It was an old jealousy and dates back many years. He came like a thief in the night and took my husband, and a year later, as I believe, my child. Do you wonder that I have refused to believe that the river finished him? I care not what the doctors say—I don't look at the verdict of the coroner's jury—I know that Bolivar Blake lives to be hanged for the crime of the mansion and that I shall hear some day from my child."

Captain Gold-Dust listened to this with eagerness in his eyes.

"Will you let me take the old trail?" he asked.

"It is yours."

"I know that the best of detectives have failed—"

"Because the world believes Bolivar Blake dead."

"But you do not?"

"I do not."

The villain of more than one name arose to depart.

At that instant the bell sent its clear tones through parlor and hall.

Mrs. Holden sprung up and left her visitor alone.

Captain Gold-Dust leaned toward the door and listened.

Why did he start and for a moment lose color until he looked like a statue?

In an instant he was on his feet, quivering under the hanging lamp that brightened the widow's parlor, with no blood at his lips which were glued together.

His eyes were riveted on the door, and, tiger-like, he was watching it, as if he expected to see the sheriff enter there.

All at once the footsteps of Mrs. Holden came back and in her hand was a letter at which she glanced with a good deal of eagerness.

"I am ready to render you any assistance in my power," she said to Captain Gold-Dust.

"I will come when I wish to consult you."

"You shall enter here at all times. My house is open to the men of the trail. I shall send no more out to the death mines of the far West. We were deceived by a letter upon which was traced in chemicals a map of Arizona."

"Was that what started your detectives West?" asked the man.

"That sent them thither."

"Who sent you the map, madam?"

"A woman who has played a singular hand in the game since the murder. I have tried to run her down, but she has slipped through my hands. I am convinced, however, that she was the once wife of this very Bolivar Blake. She acknowledged once that the map was her work; but there she stopped, the cunning creature!"

The cool-headed man waited to hear no more. He seemed to be burning with desire to get out of the house.

Three minutes had not elapsed since the departure of the person who had delivered the letter which Mrs. Holden seemed so eager to read. The voice of that person still thrilled him.

Once more on the street he looked in every direction.

The glare of the lamps was on every side. He took a step and then appeared to halt again.

Across the street, hidden by the shadows of a tree, stood a man who saw him all the time.

When he moved on again the eyes of the watcher followed him and when he turned the nearest corner the tree was deserted and the tracker was on the trail.

But Captain Gold-Dust did not see the man who was playing shadow at the risk of his life; he kept on down the thoroughfare and at last reached his own house.

All at once a figure started from the shadow of the door-frame and stood before him.

"I've been waiting for you and thought I could find you here quickest," said the man.

"Shall we go in?"

"No. My office is not far off, and I know there are no listeners there."

The speaker had run his arm through Captain Gold-Dust's and was escorting him away.

"I have entrapped the red tracker!"

"Not so soon!" cried the bandit-nabob almost breaking away from his detective.

"I have him in a trap such as he never set for any one in his native mountains. I did not think a wily wolf like him could be caged so nicely; but I risked my head to do it."

"I understand."

It was not long ere the two men sat at Sidney Cerberus's table, and Captain Gold-Dust was showing the glee which the ferret's words had imparted.

"But you did not tell me that the other one was back," said the detective.

"What other one?"

"Morel."

There was no start. Only, there passed over the face under the jet a shadow of pallor which seemed inclined to stay.

"I thought so! I heard his voice. I knew him by the sound, of it!" he said. "Why, I saw that man swept to death by the Devil's Tide; but here he is, alive and at my heels! Sidney Cerberus, you are still with me? I will help you. Ten thousand dollars for the trapping of this man."

"Make it twenty," coolly said the ferret shark.

"Twenty it is!" was the reply.

CHAPTER XXXII.

SHADOW AND SHADOW.

"I've set a hawk to catch a hawk. Will he do it?"

Captain Gold-Dust's voice had a strange sound as these words fell from his tongue.

He was back again in the elegant house he had taken as Burt Butler, a silver king from the far West, but not quite at his ease.

His visit to Mrs. Holden would have been counted a success if he had not discovered that Monk Morel, instead of rotting some where on the shores of the Devil's Tide, was even then in the city; that Durac of Hurricane Ledge was still on his trail, the same persistent tracker of old.

He would have given thousands to know how he had escaped the waters that rushed through the dark; but his presence was proof that he had escaped them, and his duty was to see that he did not carry out the vow he had taken for Mrs. Holden, the widow of the murdered man.

Yes, he had set a hawk to catch a hawk; he had turned a fox upon a fox's track, and from what he knew of Sidney Cerberus, he could not have found a better man-hunter in the city.

Guided by the offer of twenty thousand dollars Cerberus resolved to earn every dollar of it by carrying out his part of the bargain.

He went to work at once.

He had netted Owllet, the Indian tracker, and even then cooped up in four walls where he could hear the low monotonous swish of the river, the young destroyer of Arizona walked back and forth like a caged tiger, gnashing his teeth and now and then beating the stones that hemmed him in.

Sidney Cerberus was like a good many of his class—mercenary and merciless.

He knew how Monk Morel looked when he went off on the trail for the millionaire's widow, but he did not expect to find him looking the same now.

Another night came and he seemed to stand on the very fringe of a brilliant triumph.

If Morel knew where Captain Gold-Dust lived in style he would be found watching the house and Cerberus watched it, too.

A man came and stared awhile at the mansion and then crept away under the lamps.

"In an instant the paid tracker was at his heels and tracked him to a small house which he entered."

"Found! That's winning twenty thousand in a hurry," muttered Sidney Cerberus. "I have run him down and all I have to do is to cage him. But I won't send him to keep the Indian company. That will never do. I want them apart. The red tracker must not know that Morel is alive."

The next day and the next came and went.

The bandit-nabob smarted under restraint; he sent note after note to Sidney Cerberus's office, but could hear nothing from his man.

"May be the tiger has turned catcher," he suddenly exclaimed when "Mottor" came back and said that the place was closed and that no one had been seen about it for twelve hours.

"Heavens, is it possible that my ferret has sold out to another?" he roared.

The echo of his words were all the answer he received.

No, Sidney Cerberus had not "sold out."

The paid shadow had accidentally fallen into a

trap. Beauty and a pistol had caught him when he least expected it, and while Captain Gold-Dust was cursing his absence, he was where he could render him no assistance.

Morel knew his new hunter and seemed to foresee the bargain which had been made.

He had not come back from the Devil's Tide to be outwitted by a man like Sidney Cerberus, though he knew it would require all his wits to prevent the detective netting him at Captain Gold-Dust's instigation.

The hired shadow had seen a woman come out of the house to which he had tracked the person supposed to be the Man from Hurricane Ledge.

He shadowed her.

Soon after he discovered that she was a woman he had seen before, that he had encountered her in the vicinity of the house in which his master lived, and thought that in all probability she was the same one who had called during Captain Gold-Dust's absence.

To track this creature down might be to discover something about Monk Morel and how to entrap him, and Cerberus threw himself eagerly into the task.

He saw her turn suddenly from the sidewalk and enter one of the lighted squares.

A minute later he did the same, but all at once he came upon her talking to the very man he had seen watching Captain Gold-Dust's mansion.

In an instant Cerberus drew back and sought the shadow of a tree.

Fortunately he had not been seen, and when the two separated he moved on after the woman.

Three squares away she entered a house, but left the door ajar.

This was too tempting to be resisted by Sidney Cerberus and he slipped inside and listened in the dim hall.

One of the corners of this hall was very dark and as he screwed his body into it a footstep came down the stair and he saw the woman he had tracked.

On the last step she halted, and all at once threw up her hand to the burner overhead.

"Come out! You have been trapped!" she said in tones that thrilled the man in the corner. "I thought you were a spy and would take the bait. Come out, I say!" and the ferret of Gotham looked into the muzzle of a cocked revolver.

Sidney Cerberus gnashed his teeth but came out of the shadow and looked at his captor.

"Open the door at your right!" commanded the woman.

The detective obeyed.

A sudden thought took possession of his brain; but it was dissipated by the step he heard behind him, and when he turned after entering the room he saw the woman at his heels.

"What does he pay you for this work?" demanded the fair creature.

"What does who pay me?"

"The man in whose employ you are."

There was no answer.

"Shall I be plainer, Sidney Cerberus, as they call you? What does Captain Gold-Dust give you for this hunt, if successful?"

"Woman, you address me in riddles," said the ferret at last. "You are playing a dangerous game. I know no man named Captain Gold-Dust."

A low, scornful laugh rippled over the lips before him.

The following moment Sidney Cerberus took a step toward the door.

"Back!"

The pistol looked him in the face once more. It brought him to a halt, and he saw the flashing of the dark eyes behind the leveled weapon.

"You are a prisoner," she said.

"Whose prisoner?"

"Wait and see."

In less than ten minutes a sound of feet was heard in the hall and the door flew open.

Sidney Cerberus started when his eye caught sight of the person who came in.

"Monk Morel!" he inwardly ejaculated.

The two men stood face to face, the hired ferret leaning forward in his sudden eagerness to read the thoughts of the other.

"Your weapons! Hand them to Zoe," said the new-comer.

The woman advanced toward him, while a revolver, suddenly displayed by the tireless detective, covered him, and he banded over his firearms, which Zoe took with a smile.

Fox had captured fox, and Captain Gold-Dust might wait in vain for the man he had hired.

Sidney Cerberus found himself the sole inmate of a room underground which he could pace from wall to wall with the dim light of a single jet falling upon his face.

It was a new experience in his career of man-hunter. He had never been caught before, though the prey had turned on him many times; and he had outwitted some of the coolest and most dangerous criminals above ground.

What would Captain Gold-Dust say now? Would he be permitted very much liberty, for had not Morel and the woman called Zoe already discovered him; and was not his own capture the first move against the long-hunted villain of the city of secrets?

He saw that the stones in the walls of his prison were loose here and there.

An eager desire took possession of his soul and before long he had tried a dozen. He pulled them from the wall only to find a hard ground beyond and when he saw that all he had in the shape of iron or steel was his watch spring, he gave up in despair.

Wall after wall he attacked.

Hour after hour passed and he fell back from his task only to look at the jet and to curse the trick that had been played on him.

The heart of the prisoner is seldom entirely crushed.

Sidney Cerberus stood in a chamber which his naked hands, aided now and then by pieces of sharp stones, had tunneled in the earth beyond one of the walls of the cell.

He did not know how far he had tunneled, but the thought struck him at last that he had worked long enough.

At last he began to penetrate the dirt overhead.

Presently a heavy stone fell in upon him and when he had removed it he found that he had discovered a dark passage of some kind into which he drew his body.

The air was heavy and foul. As he crawled up into the place an army of rats scampered away, and he paused for breath.

"This is better than the cellar. It is the highway to freedom and the twenty thousand," he said. "I will have interest for this terrible experience."

He moved down the corridor, feeling his way as he advanced.

It came to an end at last.

Sidney Cerberus found a bolted door and laid his hand on the bolt with a feeling of keen pleasure.

But something seemed to hold him back. What lay beyond that portal?

"The devil always helps his own," he said. "He has never deserted me for long at a time. Here goes!"

He shot back the rusted bolt and jerked the old door open.

As he did this a scream fell upon his ears and he was pounced upon and seized before he could draw back into the grime and darkness of the subterranean passage.

The next instant he was dragged to the light and beheld a hideous face which almost touched his own.

"Do you know me?" screeched a voice. "Do you know me, Sidney Cerberus? I have prayed night and day for this hour. I have longed to find you in my power as I was once in yours, though I dared not quit this place to hunt you. Years ago you hunted me down nor ceased until I was behind the iron bars of Sing Sing. And when I came out, husband and child were dead and the brand of crime was still on my soul, placed there by you! Do you know me? I am Bowery Bess, ha! ha! ha!"

Sidney Cerberus drew back, but not far. The hand of the hideous creature was at his throat. In the horror of the moment he wished himself back among the rats.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

THE HUNT OF THE DEFORMED.

CAPTAIN GOLD-DUST, or Burt Butler as he was now known to the denizens of New York, swayed for some time between safety and fear.

He had lost his tracker, to be sure, but at last Sidney Cerberus's absence came to be interpreted in a manner in consonance with his desires.

He believed that the ferret was on the trail, and could not report until he had netted Monk Morel, whom he was to net for the snug sum of twenty thousand dollars.

As for Cerberus himself, he had fallen into the clutches of one of his former victims, and he felt that he would rather be back among the rats of the underground passage than in her grip.

The door through which he had gained an entrance to the hovel inhabited by the woman, had been shut behind him, and he was at her mercy, for she had gripped his throat, and her talon-like fingers had sunk into his flesh.

The slightest move on his part caused her to fly at him again, and the man-hunter feared for his life, for she had sworn to "get even" with him for the trip to Sing Sing long years before.

Fate seemed to have driven Captain Gold-Dust's detective into this terrible situation, and forced against the wall with the blazing eyes of the woman in his face, he almost gave up, and was ready to sink to the floor and let her finish her work.

Captain Gold-Dust reclined on the sofa in his parlor, counting the hours and awaiting the return of the servant he had sent for the fiftieth time to the ferret's quarters.

He had surrounded himself with wealth since coming back to the scene of his one great crime. This he had to do to keep up appearances as a silver magnate, but he had not overdone the thing.

The appointments of the room were elegant in the extreme, and but for the knowledge that he was a hunted man, though a million people believed him dead, he might have drawn a

supremely happy breath and feared nothing, not even the men-hunters of the town.

Captain Gold-Dust was alone.

Presently there came down the carpeted stair, just beyond the room, a footstep which he did not hear.

It crept from step to step like the tread of a cat, and when it touched the floor in the hall it went no further, though its owner looked toward the door of the parlor.

"He is in there!" said the maker of the velvet steps. "I have surely found him at last, but I will not break his dreams now."

The speaker glided to the door and listened, but not a sound came from the room.

By and by a hand reached up and caught the cross-piece at the top of the portal.

It seemed that the creature could not use the other hand for its strange deformity; but with Herculean strength it pulled the little body up until the chin rested on the transom bar.

Then it hung there like a monkey, and looked down into the room beyond the door.

The cool, clear eyes singled out Captain Gold-Dust on the sofa, and from the moment of finding him they got a devilish glitter.

"He is safe here. He has left the old names back in the gold camps, and the head in Satan's Canyon," laughed the deformed. "How bappy he looks, but I notice that sometimes he starts when he hears a sound, and when he is out on the streets he is constantly looking at people. Captain Gold-Dust, this is better than setting fire to shanties, and throwing their owners back into the flames. This is better than being hunted by Durac, of Hurricane Ledge. I should say so!" and the laugh that welled from the throat of the speaker was almost loud enough to reach the ears of the man in the parlor.

It was some time before the monkey-like figure hanging along the door dropped to the floor, and when it did it ran back into the far corner of the hall, and waited till the door was opened and a man came in.

"Mottor has come back," said the cripple. "I would like to know what he has to say."

Mottor had come back with the same old report, at which Captain Gold-Dust swore a little, and then told the servant that the rest of the night was at his disposal.

Mottor had no sooner left than the deformed came from his hiding-place, and listened at the door again.

"I'll go back awhile. There's nothing here for me," he said, and then vanished for good.

Back through the hall and out into the alley behind the mansion crept, rather than walked, the cripple.

Now and then a strange laugh would ripple over his lips, and he would clench his one good hand and grate his teeth.

"If I thought some one else would get him I'd go back and kill him to-night," he said. "If I thought they would find him I would risk my head in the mansion, and appear to the shanty-burner of the Volcanic Hills. I want to tell him the story of my last night on the old trail, when he found me and deliberately shot me down; how I was tracked by the blood-smelling wolves, and how when daylight came the vultures spied me, and tried for hours to get at me; but I had had strength enough to get between two boulders, and fought them off with my hand."

"It is a long lane that never turns, Captain Gold-Dust. I swore, more dead than alive, among the mountains, that this one should turn before you died. It is near the turning-point now. Your young slave is dead. Full-Deck Frank, who served you so well, died the night the Ravens swooped down upon Wildcat, for I found him at his last, and though wounded myself, covered him with the soil of the hills when all was over. He told me all he knew about you, and it was from him that I learned something about the great crime that made you an outlaw, and why Durac watched you like a hawk. When I lost you I thought you might drift back to this city—back to the old ground, and by close trailing I discovered the track you made. And so I am here!"

The deformed had reached a dark alley at the mouth of which he paused a moment and then dragged his body into it.

But he had been seen. A man who had followed him some distance entered the alley after him and watched him to the door of a house, which he pushed open and then shut.

Instead of moving away after this discovery, the tracker went further and crept into the house.

"Who is that?" called out the cripple in the demi-gloom.

"It is I, Magog."

"My God! it is some one who knows me," was the exclamation.

The next moment the clicking of a revolver broke the silence which had followed the last words and the cripple leaned toward the voice and waited.

"I have the eyes of a bat. God gave them to me instead of something better," he said. "I see you, and if you don't come forward I will send a bullet through your heart."

The tracker went forward and the deformed moved the pistol closer to his breast.

"Strike a light," he said.

It was done and the next instant Copeland stood revealed.

There was a gleam of instant recognition on the cripple's face.

"It is the Jonah of Tiger Trace!" he laughed.

Copeland nodded.

"What brought you to New York?" he asked.

"Vengeance! Look at my face and hands."

"We thought you were dead."

"The rocks saved me from the vultures. I fought them off till they grew weary. It was a desperate fight, but I won the day."

Copeland did not speak for a moment.

"Have you seen him yet, Magog?"

"I have been to his house. It is as fine as a palace."

"Not under his roof?" cried Copeland, falling back in surprise.

"I have slept there. Think of it, Copeland; I have slept in one of his elegant beds."

The look which Magog met became a stare of incredulity.

"Magog, you can't have this man."

"I can't? And why not, pray?"

"The old crime takes precedence."

For a moment Copeland thought the deformed would fly at his throat, and mechanically drew back.

"The—old—crime, eh?" he echoed. "You mean the one for which he was hunted for Durac?"

"That is the one."

"And so I can't have him because it stands first on the calendar of vengeance?"

"Yes."

"I am going to prove you a liar, Copeland."

"But you must let the old crime be avenged. It was murder—murder committed in this city, and fate has brought him back for doom."

Once more Magog, sitting on the floor, showed his teeth like a tiger's cub.

"You make me laugh, Copeland," he said.

"You try to tell me that the old crime stands ahead of mine. Behold this!" he held out his scarified hand. "Look at my face. It never was the face of an angel, but my mother used to kiss it. To her it was as pretty a face as ever a baby had. And you tell me that this man shall escape the vengeance I have carried from the Volcanic Hills? Copeland, you make me laugh, I say."

"But they may be hemming him in now."

"What, that rich man who calls himself Silver Butler from the West?"

"Yes."

"I guess not, Copeland."

The Jonah of Tiger Trace could not but stare at the little heap of revenge on the floor.

"I will be in at the death," suddenly continued Magog. "All of you can't wrench this man from Magog of Arizona. What a big city this is! I found this place by accident and will live here the rest of my days. Yes, in at the death! That's why I'm here."

Copeland moved toward the door, but Magog by a sudden move caught and stopped him.

"I held the secret of the Lost Presidio, Copeland," he said.

The young man laughed.

"You don't believe it, I see. I stumbled upon the place while hiding from Captain Gold-Dust after the brutal shot under the stars. By the souls of the saints, Copeland, I have the long lost secret."

"Why didn't you remain out there and utilize it?"

"Vengeance first!" cried Magog. "Where are the rest of them? I saw Owlet last night—the handsome young chief of the Ravens! No, it was two nights ago. Is he on the trail because some one stopped Wild Winnie's song in the mountains? Where is the Man from Hurricane Ledge? Do you know, Copeland?"

There was no reply.

"And where is the beauty of the whip?" said Magog. "Is my pretty angel, Cyrene, in this city? Some others must be here, because you intimate that I will never get to close in on Captain Gold-Dust. Copeland, I saw you banished from Wildcat by the Death Tribunal. Now you are here. They won't repeat the banishment in this city, eh, my friend? No, you are safe here."

Magog arose with the last word and faced Copeland.

"He is mine, I say! I warn you all not to touch the man I have tracked from the Volcanic Hills. Copeland, go back to Cyrene. Don't interpose a hand between Magog and the bandit nabob."

"Heavens! what a creature!" said the young man.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

IN THE DETECTIVE'S DEN.

MRS. HOLDEN, the widow of the murdered millionaire had not forgotten the veiled woman who had visited her with the story of the tragedy of Tiger Trace. All her efforts to discover the identity of the person had been unavailing; she had disappeared as completely as if the city had swallowed her up.

She believed her to be a cast-off wife of Bolivar Blake's, and taking this view of the case,

her detectives had worked for her, but all had failed.

Months had passed, but the woman had not recrossed her path.

One night—it was the same night that witnessed the scenes detailed in the foregoing chapter of our romance—Mrs. Holden heard the quick tones of her bell, and found on the step this strange creature.

In she came without invitation and stood again under the lights veiled as before, and looking as tall as ever.

"I am back," said she, looking at the widow. "I have not passed your door for months. Why don't you start out a fresh bloodhound?"

For a moment there was no answer.

"And have him lose his head?" said the widow. "You told me when here last of the tragedy of the Southwest. You said that you sent the letter and the map written in chemicals. What have you to tell me now?"

"Why don't you start out another bloodhound, I say?"

"Give me a clew, and I will."

The other laughed until the fringe of the black veil shook.

"The hunted fox is nearer than you think," said the hidden lips. "He is almost within the shadow of your house. Go to work. I will tell no more."

Almost before the widow could catch her breath she was alone and the door had shut on her visitor.

She ran to the window, but the figure had vanished and when she came back she stood for a minute in the center of the room in a state of bewilderment.

"I will do it!" she cried. "She has warned me and I am confident that she knows where he is. Is he back in this city? Let me prove that Bolivar Blake was not found in the river, and I shall be ready to depart."

She ordered out her carriage and, despite the hour, was driven to the office of a well-known detective who listened to her story and promised to take up the trail at once; but when he dismissed her he dropped back into his chair and smiled.

"Harmless," he said. "She will die believing that the body taken from the river was not the corpse of Bolivar Blake. We humor her whenever she comes to us with her old, old story and I shan't discourage the poor creature. Bolivar is easily found. He is over there in Greenwood."

During this scene the woman who had just left the Holden mansion was going back to her retreat which the detectives had failed to find, if, indeed, they had ever really hunted for it.

There she threw aside her veil and stood revealed as a fine looking person of less than forty. Her eyes were dark and lustrous, her figure graceful and her voice well toned; but there was about her a look of mingled sorrow and hatred which seemed to have seared her past life.

"The trouble is the detectives won't take much stock in her story," this woman said, speaking aloud to herself when she found that no one was a listener. "She has been to them so often and clung so tenaciously to the theory that the corpse taken from the water more than ten years ago was not the corpse of Bolivar Blake, that they treat her like a harmless maniac, and it is doubtful if she can get any one to believe that I have visited her."

She was silent for a few moments, when she broke out into a laugh.

"He hasn't visited me yet and I am the first person on whom he should have called. He has engaged the services of Sidney Cerberus, but has steered clear of me. Why has he hired the detective? Did he tell him the secret of the past? Has he employed the ferret to watch for shadows in his path? I would like to have an interview with Mr. Cerberus myself."

Five minutes later she was down on the street and hurrying off in direction of the office inhabited by the man who was Captain Gold-Dust's watch-dog.

She did not knock when she reached the proper door, but opened it and walked in.

"Not at home?" she exclaimed, finding the place without a tenant.

Sidney Cerberus had not come back from his last adventure. He was yet in the grip of Bowery Bess, and there was no telling when the stern fingers would relax and let him get back to the employ of his last master.

The veil had been pulled over the face which had been hidden from the Widow Holden and the woman stood for a few moments in the room wondering if it were best to wait awhile or to glide back from whence she came.

She heard a clock in the near neighborhood strike the hour and its strokes were counted as they were told off.

"It's late," she said. "I will go back and come some other time."

She was advancing toward the door when it suddenly opened and she fell back from the man who presented himself.

There stood Captain Gold-Dust, a look of surprise and impatience mingled in his eyes. His handsome black beard glistened in the light and seemed to send a thrill through the woman who stood at the ferret's table.

"Mr. Cerberus is not at home," said a voice under the veil.

It seemed to send Captain Gold-Dust forward, as though it had a strange but familiar tone and the following moment he was close to the speaker.

All at once the hand of the woman went up to her face and the veil was thrown back.

"My God!"

The bandit nabob recoiled with the exclamation on his tongue, and the woman leaned forward and looked into his colorless face.

"An unexpected meeting, is it?" she said.

"You did not expect to see me in the office of your hired bloodhound? No! But I am here and am glad to see you once more."

He did not speak.

"I knew you were back. I saw you perhaps the very first day and recognized you at once. Did you think you could deceive me? You might hide from the ferrets sent after you by the woman whose dreams are of revenge; you might escape them; but did you hope to conceal your identity from me?"

Captain Gold-Dust came back as if reassured and stood near the table again.

"You haven't changed a great deal," he ventured.

"But you have," she smiled.

"I have seen enough to change my appearance."

"And, then, a man who has lived for ten years in the shadow of the gallows ought to change some."

"How have you been?"

"Most of the time a hider like yourself," was the reply, couched in tones of bitterness. "I gave her the clew she caught at, and when you, in the moment of another triumph, wrote me about the severed head of Tiger Trace, I took the news to her."

"So it was you who gave her the clew which sent Monk Morel after me?"

"Yes."

"Curse you, woman, you must have had a spasm of madness on."

"Why not?" laughed the other. "Do you think I should have permitted you to enjoy your exile without excitement? But the detective lost his head, so what's the difference?"

Captain Gold-Dust made no reply.

"You are living in clover now, I see," she went on. "You are Burt Butler, one of the silver nabobs of the Southwest where men make fortunes in a night. The old friends don't know you. They pass you on the street and look, but that is all. They believe you dead and buried. Look here! You promised to rectify the wrong one of these days. You said you would take back the wife you repulsed years ago when she was little better than a girl."

The man who listened seemed to recoil from the woman who was looking him through while she talked.

"But you gave her the clew," he growled.

"I know I did; but think of the treatment I received at your hands. You forget this."

"I had to fight for my life because of Monk Morel's coming."

"I don't doubt that. She could not have sent a more persistent tracker after you."

"I had to fight like a tiger."

The woman smiled.

"But success crowned your efforts and here you are unknown again in the city of your youth and other deeds. They don't know you who once jostled you on the pave and in the Stock Exchange. You ought to redeem your promise. The world will never know the truth. When the papers announce that Burt Butler has led a young widow to the altar who will know that your own cast-off wife has been reinstated in your affections?"

Captain Gold-Dust was seen to recoil at this cool proposition.

"What, won't you do it?" cried the woman.

"You refuse, do you?"

He looked at her like a tiger in lurking, and all at once sent a swift glance around the room.

The door behind him was shut and they were alone in the ferret's office.

"Wait," he said. "You don't know what is transpiring just now. The hour is big with fate and though I have come back, I am not yet out of the toils."

"Who hunts you here?" she cried. "Who knows that you are the man the police wanted more than ten years ago?"

"Never mind that. You must wait."

"You said that before. In one of your letters you said I should have the past made bright. You cast me off for what? I would not obey you when your hands were red. Bolivar Blake, I am here for justice. Atone for the past, or by the God who sees the murderer no matter where he hides, I will send you to the scaffold!"

She stood before him the incarnation of vengeance and truth, and he, falling back, looked at her and saw the dark eyes flash.

"I have waited. I know where the trackers are. I know who inhabits this den; but I would not go to him. This man is yours. You have bought Sidney Cerberus with a price. You have hired him to guard you from the avenging shadows that might come from the moun-

tains of the Southwest—a headless shadow, perhaps."

He did not move.

"Swear that the past shall be wiped out. Swear here in the den of your paid ferret that you will take me back or—"

He sprang forward and quicker than thought caught her wrist, his fingers sinking as it seemed to the very bone.

"What will you do, woman, if I don't swear?"

"I will unmask the silver magnate of the West. I will show this great city the living form of Bolivar Blake."

He threw her against the table by a quick motion, and then, before she could shriek or resist, clutched her throat.

Tighter and tighter grew his grip. She struggled awhile and then sunk passive to the floor. He looked down at the figure and bent over it.

"Have I killed the city leopardess?" he said. "By heavens! I did not expect to encounter her here."

CHAPTER XXXV.

OUT OF DURANCE.

THE next day the shutters of Burt Butler's elegant mansion were not opened, and Motter, the servant who came out, locked the door and said that his master had gone to the seaside and would not be back the rest of the summer.

Motter told this to a man who had formed his acquaintance within the last few days and with whom he had grown familiar, cracking a few bottles late at night in one of the cafes.

"He took a sudden notion, didn't he, Motter?" asked this man.

"Rather. He came home last night and said he believed he would try the sea air, and as day travel was dusty and hot, he would take the midnight limited, and off he went."

"Is it Long Branch or Atlantic City?"

Motter did not know. Mr. Butler had not taken the precaution to tell him, and, in fact, he did not care, as he would have nothing to do for some weeks, and could enjoy himself.

"They do some queer things in this city, Motter; some queer crimes are committed, I mean."

"What's the latest?" asked Motter.

The two had reached a cafe near the silver magnate's mansion and the butler's magnanimous friend had ordered the usual recreation—a bottle of green seal.

"A woman was found choked into insanity in the office of one of our man-catchers."

"Who did it?—the detective himself?"

"It looks that way. He isn't to be found and she can't tell anything about the assault."

"Where is she?"

"At the hospital!"

"Any hopes for her?"

"Oh, she may live, but the paper says she will never recover her reason."

"That's a devilish queer case. But in whose office was she found? I happen to have been to several within a few days."

"It happened in Sidney Cerberus's den."

Motter started with a slight gasp.

"I've been there," he said. "I went down quite often for the captain, but never could find the detective at home. I guess he won't let them catch him if he had anything to do with the choking business. I wouldn't, I know."

"What train did your master take, Motter?"

"He left the house about midnight."

"You took him off, eh?"

"Yes."

Motter emptied another glass and wiped his mouth complacently, and not at all with the air of a man who had just told a deliberate lie.

A few minutes later Motter was alone, and the friend who had treated him so handsomely was walking off with a faint smile at his mouth.

"The bird has not flown," this person said. "The vulture of the Arizona hills has not gone to bathe his wings in the sea. Sidney Cerberus had no land in the deed of last night because he is where he couldn't have reached the throat that got such a choking. I will prove this at once."

The speaker, who was Monk Morel the Man-Hunter, turned into a certain street and after a long walk entered a house to the cellar of which he immediately proceeded.

All at once he uttered a strange cry and fell back from a tunnel which his light revealed.

"The rat has escaped!" he cried. "You have done a little effective tunneling, Sidney Cerberus, and ere this have notified your master that I am still on the trail."

Monk Morel plunged into the tunnel, but was soon stopped by a lot of dirt and forced to turn back.

He returned with a scowl on his face.

"I always knew you for a fox, but did not expect you would give us the slip in this manner," he smiled. "Where is Zoe?"

He did not stop until he ran up the steps of a certain house and confronted a woman who started on seeing him.

"You have made a discovery?" she said.

"I have. The rat in our trap is at liberty."

She went toward him with a sharp cry.

"Sidney Cerberus?"

"Sidney Cerberus!"

The woman stood before him a moment and then caught his arm.

"He will tell his master all!" she suddenly said.

"But Captain Gold-Dust's mansion is shut up to-day and Motter, the glib, tells me that he has gone to the sea-shore."

"That means flight," said Zoe.

Monk Morel looked up into her face and smiled.

"You remember what Copeland told you about his adventure with Magog?"

"Yes, yes."

"The little man may have shown himself to Captain Gold-Dust."

"No; Sidney Cerberus has sounded the note of warning."

Morel arose and went to the door.

"Which way now?"

"To the trail."

"To the seaside?"

"I think not. This is the last quarter of the race, Zoe. I shall find my old game and finish the play."

"May fortune favor you," and she came forward and took his hands. "This is not Tiger Trace where people lose their heads, but beware! You know your man; you know what he has done. I need not warn you, Monk Morel."

He was gone. The door closing behind the tireless detective seemed to unnerve Zoe.

She dropped into a chair and buried her face in her hands.

"Will it never end?" she cried. "Am I always to be an outcast, and when the hunt for vengeance is over must I go back to the wild camps of the Southwest and be Cyrene once more? Heaven protect the man who is still on the trail. May he avenge the death of Wild Winnie who fell before the revolver of the bandit nabob of the Volcanic Hills because she was the living accusation of crime."

She started up and stood for a moment in the center of the room, her white hands clinched and her eyes ablaze.

Suddenly she sprang across the apartment and jerked from a peg on the wall a whip which she raised above her head.

"I wish I had him before me once more!" she cried. "Would to heaven I had his face to cut as once I had it. I would like to lay the cheek open to the very bone; but if he finds him, I will never have that pleasure."

A footstep came near and the door opened. Copeland stood before her.

At sight of her with the whip the young man fell back a step and then smiled.

"I was wishing for his face to cut once more," she said. "I would like to strike it three times. There would be blood on the beard of the silver magnet of the hills."

The youth looked at her and saw her lay aside the lash with a sigh.

"Copeland, what if the bunch of bones and vengeance whom you encountered last night should meet him first?"

"He says he will. Magog has sworn to avenge the scars on his own person."

"He may follow Captain Gold-Dust to the sea-shore—"

"So may Monk Morel."

"Not for the world would I have that cripple succeed. Morel has been on the trail so long; he has tracked his man across the continent, taking up the old trail—in fact, tracking a dead man to find him alive among the Volcanic Hills."

"He deserves success."

"Think of the Devil's Tide," continued Zoe. "Think of the trails Morel has made for the widow in the fine mansion on the avenue. Would to heaven I dared come forth in my own rue dress. I long to be Cyrene once more."

"Cyrene the outcast?" smiled the young man.

"Yes, even that. I want to tell the widow what Wild Winnie told me after the shot in the mountains. I can solve the fate of the stolen child."

"Wait," said Copeland. "The time will come for this. It can't be far off now."

"I have waited so long, and the bandit nabob may escape."

"Not from Monk Morel."

Once more Zoe, or Cyrene, found herself alone.

"What has become of the Indian?" she suddenly exclaimed. "They have not seen him for some time. He surely reached this city on his vengeance-hunt, but has vanished. Owlet, the chief of the red destroyers, must have become disgusted and given up the trail. New York is not the Volcanic Hills."

The girl went out, locking the door behind her.

She was passing the mouth of an alley when a cry and a spring attracted her and the next moment her arm was clutched.

Cyrene fell back with a quick cry and then stared at the person who had caught her.

That he was an Indian she well knew, but his eyes had the wild look of a maniac and his garments hung in shreds about his figure.

He was looking at her as if his eyes would pierce her like arrows, and the longer Cyrene saw that horrid stare the more frightened she became.

"Heavens! it is Owlet!" she cried.

At sound of the name the Indian started and drew her forward.

"Owlet has come out of the home of the rats. He has escaped from the white man's trap! The hider of the hills caught the Moqui, but he is out. He has found the beauty of the whip. Where does she live? Owlet wants rest."

Cyrene turned back. She conducted the Indian home and saw him sink exhausted on the floor.

"Strength will come back to Owlet," he said, looking up at her. "He will be strong enough to go back to the trail, and then he will find the man he was tracking when the trap caught him."

Cyrene bathed his temples, and found how hot they were. She saw, too, on his flesh the marks of teeth and nail, and her whole heart went out in pity for the young eagle of the Moquis.

"Owlet will find him," the Indian kept muttering in his delirium. "He will take back to the grave of the singing-bird of the mountains the scalp of the hunter that shot her. He has crossed the land of lakes and rivers to find him, and he shall not escape."

By and by the Indian sunk into a deep slumber, and Cyrene stole forth in search of Copeland.

Success did not seem to reward her for a long time.

"I must find him," she would exclaim. "We must keep the secrets of Owlet's whereabouts until the game has been finished by Morel. Captain Gold-Dust must not know that the young chief of the Ravens has found me, and that he is my guest now."

She found Copeland at last, and the two went back to her lodgings.

Cyrene opened the door and then recoiled.

"What is it?" asked Copeland, bending forward.

"Look!"

The young man did so.

Owlet was gone!

CHAPTER XXXVI.

THE HIDDEN TIGER.

THE detectives of New York had a case that peculiarly interested them.

The woman found choked into insensibility in Sidney Cerberus's office had come out of the shadow of death, but had not regained her right mind.

What had become of the shadow shark of the metropolis? That was the puzzling question.

For once the ferrets of Gotham were hunting high and low without hope or promise of reward.

No one looked into the large house on the avenue which the silver magnate had taken, and why should they? Burt Butler had taken a flight to the sea-shore, leaving Motter in charge of the deserted building, and Motter was having good times with a new-found friend who knew just what kinds of wines he liked.

It was night in the big house, and as usual not a sign of light was seen from the outside. Those who passed it sometimes thought of the man who, after a brief stay in the city, had sought the ocean to get a whiff of sea breeze; but, strange to say, no dispatches had chronicled his arrival at any of the watering-places.

Where nabobs were constantly coming and going, what was the need of telling the public that Burt Butler, late of the West, had reached "The Palace" or "The Colonnade?"

If the public could have been admitted to the house, the public would have been undeceived and astonished.

Reclining on the settee in the luxurious parlor, the lights of which were turned down almost to complete extinction, was a man who every now and then sent whiffs of smoke above his head.

Captain Gold-Dust!

There stood on the round table within his reach a decanter and chased goblets, and every now and then he would lean forward and help himself.

Shut up, like a prisoner, he was in hiding and not at the sea-shore. The last scenes he had passed through were before him; he lived over his meeting with the veiled woman he encountered in Sidney Cerberus's den, and near him lay a paper which, in a brief paragraph, told him that she was still a speechless mystery of the hospital, and that life-long insanity was her doom.

"This is beating the ferrets till I can get second wind," he said, laughing aloud. "This is keeping them at bay until I can hear from Cerberus, who must be on the trail, and perhaps out of the city. The man loves money too well to fail me. Twenty thousand is not to be picked up every day by the profession, and, then, he knows who he is to find and trap. Motter?"

He touched a bell which sent its silvery tones through the house, and fell back on the velvet settee.

In a moment footsteps came from an adjoining room, and a man stood before him.

"Were you at the office again to-day, Motter?" asked Captain Gold-Dust.

"I was there at six, this evening."

"No news of him yet?"

"None."

For a moment the man on the settee looked strangely at the butler, and then closed his eyes as the figure of Motter slowly vanished.

"Motter seems to be changing his voice," he muttered. "I never noticed it before. The man has been drinking some lately—too much for safety, and I shall lecture him, but not now."

He refreshed himself again and went back to the cigar-smoking with half-closed eyes as he lay on the settee, his eyes turned toward the ceiling as though he had seen singular things there.

"I don't like to be cooped up thus. It isn't my nature. The old life in the mountains, though a hunted one, was preferable to this. It shan't last long. I will soon be a butterfly of the city again. I will know more when I see Cerberus. I wonder if she is improving? The papers say not. She should have kept her distance; the proposition she made was outrageous. Take her back! Never! I can't forget that she gave Monk Morel his first clew."

In a little while Captain Gold-Dust arose and crossed the room. A desk occupied one corner.

He took from his pocket a key and opened it.

"I wonder if I could draw the old maps from memory?" he said to himself. "I had them once but lost them among the mountains. They are the key to the Lost Presidio. I may want to use them some time. Curse this light! Why can't I turn it on more! The shutters are closed and Motter says that no light reaches the sidewalk."

He turned on the gas enough to flood the desk at which he sat and then began to trace lines on a piece of paper which he drew forth.

He was occupied at this when a figure dwarfish in outline came down the back stair without the least sound.

Two little eyes glittered in the figure's bead like twin diamonds. The hallway was reached and there the crawler stopped and listened.

Captain Gold-Dust worked on but all at once turned his head and called:

"Motter?"

The servant came back once more.

The hunted man was looking at him with all eyes as if reading him through; but Motter stood the test and stopped in the middle of the room awaiting orders.

"Did you ever hear of the Lost Presidio, Motter?" suddenly asked Captain Gold-Dust.

The man shook his head.

"I don't know what a *presidio* is," he smiled.

"By Jove! you ought to be hung for a fool!" cried the bandit nabob. "Look what I have made here," and the lines which he had drawn on the sheet were thrust forward for Motter's inspection.

"They're all Greek to you if you have never heard of the Lost Presidio," he laughed. "Why, sir, it is a bonanza which the old Spaniards hid years and years ago; but that, sir, is the key to it; those lines are the trails to the riches of the money-loving Spaniards. Some men would give their wealth for that map. Motter, my boy, you hold in your hand something worth millions."

The servant handed back the paper and looked into Captain Gold-Dust's eyes.

During these moments the figure crouched in the hall moved a little and the eyes snapped again.

"Stand yonder against the wall, Motter," said Captain Gold-Dust.

The man obeyed.

"Why, I believe you're growing yet," he went on. "If I can see straight to-night you have increased an inch in stature within the last two days."

Motter laughed and seemed to eye the decanter on the table.

Captain Gold-Dust turned to the desk and one of his hands disappeared.

"Curse you, you're playing a game!" he exclaimed, suddenly drawing out his hand, showing to Motter's gaze that it clutched a revolver.

"You are not Motter at all, but some one else."

There was no movement on the part of the man against the wall.

"I am going to kill you where you stand," the hunted man went on. "You have taken Motter's place by bribing him. Not a move! Now, sir, who are you?"

Captain Gold-Dust had left his chair and was standing erect with the deadly weapon leveled at his servant's head.

His superb figure was a study in the soft light that pervaded the room, and but ten feet separated the two men.

"I shall count five," the bandit nabob continued. "It will give you time to unmask, for at the end of the count I shall send a bullet through your brain as surely as I look you in the face. There is no mercy in my heart and you know why."

"That is what I want," whispered a voice in the dark hall. "Let him send a bullet through the other's head; that will make it easier for me."

For a moment the last words were followed by a dead silence and then the voice of Captain Gold-Dust was heard.

"One—two—three—"

Motter never moved.

"Don't you intend to confess?" asked the bandit. "Very well. I can stand it. Four—"

"I am an old acquaintance," he said. "We have met before. You hold a pistol steadily for a dead man."

Captain Gold-Dust started.

"What do you mean?"

"Just what I have said," was the reply.

"But I am no dead man, as you shall see by the sudden flash of this revolver."

"Why, you sleep in Greenwood. You are dead!"

Captain Gold-Dust did not know whether to laugh or to regard the man as demented.

"The person behind you will confirm my words," Motter said.

His gaze seemed fastened on something behind the bandit nabob and that worthy turned.

"Fool!" said the voice in the hall.

The next instant the figure of Motter left the wall like an arrow.

The single bound he made carried him across the space and his hand caught the revolver as it came back for the work of death from which his clever ruse had turned it for an instant.

"Look me in the eye, captain," he said, bending forward until their faces almost met. "You have been calling me Motter these two days. You know me now."

There was a strange stare on the eyes of the handsome white-faced man who found himself a prisoner.

"I know you. You are Monk Morel!" he said.

"The man who did not lose his head in Tiger Trace?"

At that moment the figure in the hall reached the door and the next it fell into the room with a wild cry.

CHAPTER XXXVII. IN AT THE DEATH.

THE fall of the misshapen object startled both men, but Morel did not relinquish his hold.

Captain Gold-Dust looked and showed his teeth as he greeted it with a stare of astonishment.

It was Magog—Magog the deformed!

"Anything but the teeth and claws of that mountain Phoenix," said the bandit nabob to Monk Morel. "Keep him away and I am your legitimate prey."

Magog for a moment looked at the man held in the grip of the tireless bloodhound and then sprung desperately at his throat.

"Vengeance for the shot and the fire!" he cried. "Magog has lived for this. He fought off the vultures of the hills to find his prey at last!"

It was like the fall of a stone from a catapult and the detective and his victim were driven back by the attack, but Morel managed to shake Magog loose and finally to hurl him across the luxurious room, where, with a yell of rage, he crouched on the floor and gnashed his teeth.

"I will unite my fortunes with Owlet's and we will hunt him together," he cried. "There is nothing that escapes the Raven. Ah, you shall not enjoy your triumph, Captain Morel!"

"Tell me," said Captain Gold-Dust, looking the man-hunter in the eye. "What has become of Motter?"

A smile crossed the ferret's face.

"I am Motter," was the reply.

"Yes, but not the real Motter."

"I bought your servant even as you bought your detective."

There was no reply, and the bandit nabob wondered what had become of Sidney Cerberus, his spotter.

There was no change in the fine mansion all the next day, but people saw a man come out of it in the early morning and walk away.

He did not look like Motter, the convivial servant, nor did he resemble the silver magnate who had recently taken the house.

The papers had a real sensation—one which half of the city refused to believe.

That Bolivar Blake, the man who had been sleeping for more than ten years in Greenwood, had been captured alive in New York was incredible. Some who read the sensation laid the paper away with a laugh and pronounced the whole thing a reporter's story.

Meantime there stood leaning against the bars of a prison cell a handsome man whom all recognized as Burt Butler, the silver king—none as Bolivar Blake.

Suddenly there came gliding down the corridor a man whose step was that of the panther's, and when he caught sight of the face at the bars he halted and threw one hand toward a knife in his belt.

"Gods, is that tiger out, too?" cried Captain Gold-Dust, shrinking from the sight, but, when he remembered that irons existed between him and the man he had just seen, a look of pleasure, if not victory, lit up his eyes.

Nearer and nearer came the creeping figure.

A cry of rage broke over the dark lips when their owner saw that the man of crimes was safe beyond the bars.

He pressed his face against the irons and ground his teeth.

"Owlet will wait," he said, devouring Captain Gold-Dust with his ferocious eyes. "He has crossed the land of lakes and rivers to find the man who stopped Wild Winnie's song in the

mountains. Owlet never turns from a trail till he is at the end of it. He got out of the trap which the white trailer set for him; he fought off the rats of the underground trail and is here to look Captain Gold-Dust in the eye and to tell him that the day will come when he will strike the death-blow. The Raven will swoop once more!"

The hour was late, but the widow of the avenue had not retired.

Mrs. Holden was all excitement for the capture of the man now known as Bolivar Blake had unstrung her nerves, and she had just listened to the report of the ferret who had kept the trail through thick and thin—Monk Morel, the Man with a Mission.

He was gone now and the house was silent once more.

But she was to hear another story; another mystery was to be disclosed before she slept, and the only person willing to tell her was at hand.

The bell rung and Cyrene, the Zoe of the last chapters of our romance, crossed her threshold.

"Who are you?" said Mrs. Holden, with a start.

"I am Cyrene."

The beauty of the whip was welcomed, but the millionaire's widow looked her through.

"You have a secret for me. My long-lost ferret told me there was a woman who could tell me the story of the child who left my bosom years ago. You are that person?"

Cyrene nodded.

For the next ten minutes Mrs. Holden listened to a story she had never expected to hear.

It was the story of Wild Winnie, told by the woman who had been her friend. Cyrene told how at the last moments of the poor girl's life reason came back, and how she heard from her lips a story which left no doubt that she was the lost child of Holden, the millionaire; that she had been taken West by her abductor, who, not satisfied with secretly killing the parent, had added another blow to the mother's grief.

A fall which Wild Winnie barely remembered had deprived her of reason, but the revengeful death-shot had as singularly restored it, and she died in Cyrene's arms with the story of the past on her lips.

Cyrene laid before the mother the well-worn map on which the crazy girl would trace out an imaginary line from New York to the wild Volcanic Hills, and Mrs. Holden reverently kissed the discolored trail.

"I have no child now, but you will come and live with me," she said. "I want a new daughter, and in you I will find that love which long ago existed, but for the lost."

Cyrene drew back with a stare.

"You forget. I am the outcast of Rolling Stone City," she exclaimed. "Years ago I was exiled from that camp because I would not reveal the hiding-place of a hunted boy who was detected at filching a few ounces of gold-dust. I was branded all over the region and for weeks had to hide from the toughs of Rolling Stone and its merciless Vigilantes. This is my only crime; but to be an outcast—a living outlaw is a stain which it seems years of goodness cannot wipe out."

"It matters not. Rolling Stone City is far away and this is New York. You will stay. You shall become the child of the Holdens and when the law shall have taken its course—when the great crime of the past has been avenged and all is clear—the accursed camps and trails of the Southwest will be forgotten."

Weeks elapsed before the last act of the drama we have followed until now was played out.

The police one morning found in a hovel the dead body of a woman whose hands had traced on the dingy wall of the room a name which they had almost forgotten.

There, across the wall in straggling characters was the name of Bowery Bess and beneath it an injunction to search the cellar.

The police went down the creaking steps carrying their bull's-eyes before them and scaring from some bones in one corner an army of rats. A pile of human bones, nothing more!

"But what is this? Writing on the stone like that we found in the room above!" cried one, and both lanterns were held close while their owners leaned forward to decipher the inscription.

"Gods, we have found Sidney Cerberus!"

So they had. The missing bloodhound had been found, but there was nothing to tell the story of his fate but the chain to which one of the ankles was fastened to the wall; but when they put this and that together, when they remembered that he had sent Bowery Bess to Sing Sing, they knew that the woman hiding like a hunted wolf in a great city had found him and taken vengeance.

Captain Gold-Dust read in his cell an account of the finding of the bones in the cellar.

He shut his teeth hard and looked away.

At last he knew why his detective had failed to win the twenty thousand dollars; at last he

had discovered the secret of Sidney Cerberus's absence from his den.

Justice, as a rule, is slow everywhere. It was slow in the final settlement of the Great Holden Mystery.

Bolivar Blake in his cell wrote out the story of the secret kept so well.

He told how a dead man had been invested with his garments, his rings and watch, and secretly dropped from one of the piers, and how he had slipped away to the Southwest after the crime of the mansion, to become Captain Gold-Dust of the Volcanic Hills.

There came at last a day when he was brought forth for trial.

He found looking at him with folded arms the tall, dark chief of the Ravens and involuntarily shrunk from the handsome red.

He had not forgotten Owlet's last words.

Monk Morel's triumph could go no further. He had kept his promise to the widow of the avenue; he had found Bolivar Blake, though across the continent had traveled the story that he had lost his head.

That severed head belonged to Nate Newsome, the crazy wanderer, and Captain Gold-Dust, in his eagerness to get rid of a tracker, had entered Morel's cabin in Tiger Trace and killed him without a look.

Not until afterward when he was brought face to face with Durac in Wildcat did he suspect that he had committed a bloody blunder, and saw in the man he had condemned by the Death Tribunal the tireless trailer of Gotham.

The trial was of brief duration.

One morning the prisoner was found in his cell dead, and in his bosom stuck a dagger, the handle of which was of curious workmanship, a medley of mountain stones ingeniously put together.

Cyrene smiled when she saw it and looking up at that moment caught Monk Morel's eye.

"He kept his word," said the detective as they passed from the building. "Wild Winnie is avenged at last and by the red lover who would at any time have died for her."

The death of Bolivar Blake was investigated. The guards were accused of sleeping on their posts, but they denied, and nothing was ever proved.

Owlet disappeared, and the body of the bandit nabob was buried for sure, while the bones of the unknown wretch which had incumbered the family vault so long, were unceremoniously tumbled out.

Balked of his revenge, Magog lingered in the city for some time after Cyrene's marriage to Copeland, the handsome young Jonah of Tiger Trace, and then betook his deformed body from the scene of his last attempt to get even with the man who had thrown him into the flames of his hut, and went back to look for the Lost Presidio.

Morel, the tireless, was well paid for his long hunt—indeed, Mrs. Holden would have made a money king out of him if he had submitted—and Cyrene became her adopted daughter.

Morel, the Man-Hunter, every now and then takes another trail, merely to "keep his hand in," as he says; but his supreme triumph, the one he rests his fame on, is the Great Holden Mystery.

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